

THIERRY GREUB (ED.)

CY TWOMBLY

Image, Text, Paratext



MORPHOMATA

The artworks of the US artist Cy Twombly (1928–2011) are considered to be hermetic and inaccessible. Pencil scribbles, explosions of paint, tumbling lines, overlapping layers of color, and inscriptions, geometrical figures, numerals, rows of numbers, words, fragments of quotations, and enigmatic work-titles present very special challenges to both researchers and viewers.

In the interdisciplinary and transcultural research method of the Morphomata International Center for Advanced Studies at the University of Cologne, a conference was held in June 2012 that brought art historians together with renowned scholars of Egyptology, Archaeology, German, Greek, English, Japanese, and the Romance languages, i.e. all the fields and cultural spheres that were a source of inspiration for the œuvre of Cy Twombly.

While these scholars inquire into the relation between title, work, and inscribed quotations, leading representatives of research on Twombly focus on the visual language and scriptural-imagistic quality of Cy Twombly's work.

Through comprehensive interpretations of famous single works and groups in all the artistic media employed by Twombly, the volume's cross-disciplinary view opens up a route into the associative-referential visual language of Cy Twombly.

THIERRY GREUB (ED.) – CY TWOMBLY



MORPHOMATA

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AND DIETRICH BOSCHUNG
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EDITED BY THIERRY GREUB

CY TWOMBLY

Image, Text, Paratext

WILHELM FINK

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1 Cy Twombly, Gaeta, 1994, photography: Bruce Weber

INTRODUCTION

Of all the artists of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Cy Twombly (1928–2011; ill. 1) is perhaps the most “morphomatic.” No one else has wrestled artistically with the intellectual heritage and material traces of antiquity, as well as the legacy of global cultures extending to our own times, with as much intensity as Twombly. No one else has understood the negotiation of the divide between art and literature not merely as a sideline but as one of the main purposes of his art. And no one else has attempted, in equal measure, to safeguard and interrogate the persistence of “old” figurations in the spirit of contemporary art for our time. These have been the exact areas of investigation for *Morphomata International Center for Advanced Studies—Genesis, Dynamics and Mediality of Cultural Figurations*, the international center for advanced studies in the Humanities at the University of Cologne, since its inception in 2009: the preoccupation with diverse, clearly delineated cultural figurations whose genesis, dynamics, and mediality are investigated in both diachronic and synchronic terms—that is, from their origination to their fading into oblivion and again to their potential reemergence, straight through their cultures—in order to create a new context in which alien traits become visible within that which is indigenous.¹

To that extent, cultural figurations—that is, morphomes²—preoccupied Cy Twombly during his life, too. The origins of culture and creativity, love, death, remembrance, and forgetting are but a few such universal cornerstones that define his art. At the same time, the American artist’s works are still largely viewed as being hermetic and not easily accessible. Pencil scribbles, clumps of paint, lurching lines, superimposed layers of

1 Cf. the standard case studies of Günter Blamberger: *Figuring Death, Figuring Creativity: On the Power of Aesthetic Ideas*. Munich 2013 and Dietrich Boschung: *Kairos as a Figuration of Time. A Case Study*. Munich 2013.

2 Cf. Jürgen Hammerstaedt: Die antike Verwendung des Begriffs *mórophoma*. In: Günter Blamberger / Dietrich Boschung (eds.): *Morphomata. Kulturelle Figurationen: Genese, Dynamik und Medialität* (Morphomata 1). Munich 2011, 91–109.

paint and inscriptions, geometric figures, numbers, rows of numerals, words, fragmentary quotations, and enigmatic picture titles present unusual challenges for viewers of the works as well as anyone researching them. Moreover, Twombly's artistic oeuvre spans the long time of over two generations and, alongside painting and drawing, also includes sculpture and photography, the latter of which has only recently penetrated the consciousness of an interested public.

Consistent with the interdisciplinary and transcultural research methods of *Morphomata*, a conference on Cy Twombly that met in June 2012 included art historians as well as prominent specialists in the fields of Egyptology, ancient history, ancient oriental studies, classical philology, English language and literature, archeology, German studies, ancient Greek, and Japanese studies, i.e., all the fields and cultural areas that represent prominent sources of inspiration for Twombly's work.

The first section of the present volume provides an introduction to the difficult artistic concept of Cy Twombly's work. In order to define this more precisely, *Richard Hoppe-Sailer* (Bochum) uses a two-pronged approach to taking Twombly's art out of its perceived isolation by comparing it to the efforts of U.S.-based colleagues such as Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell, and Jackson Pollock and, in addition, placing it in the context of common categories of art history (such as the genre of landscape painting). *Adriana Bontea* (Oxford) demonstrates that Twombly's statement that "there has to be a history behind [every] thought" is applicable to his own work. In a very fundamental manner, *Gottfried Boehm* (Basel) traces Twombly's artistic processes, such as the specific significance of the pictorial ground, the corporeality of artist and viewer, and the color white. *Steffen Siegel* (Jena) investigates the appropriate artistic strategies for Cy Twombly's photography, which at first glance resists any rash classification within the scheme of his oeuvre.

Both of the subsequent sections concern themselves with the sources of inspiration for Twombly's art, first from antiquity (II) and then from modernity (III). Twombly consciously allowed his art to be inspired by art—the literature and works of other artists constituted an important source. Along with art specialists, leading representatives of the fields used by Twombly as reference points (sometimes for monumental, large cycles) present their ideas here: Egyptology (*Dietrich Wildung*, Berlin, on the *Coronation of Sesostri*s); ancient history (*Stefan Priwitz*er, Heidelberg, on *Nine Discourses on Commodus*); ancient oriental studies (*Petr Charvát*, Plzeň, on two Twombly sculptures with Sumerian-Akkadian city names);

classical philology (*Jürgen Hammerstaedt*, Cologne, on Twombly and Theocritus); English language and literature (*Lisa Hopkins*, Sheffield, on Twombly's allusion to Christopher Marlowe); archeology (*Dietrich Boschung*, Cologne, on *Cnidian Venus*); German studies (*Georg Braungart*, Tübingen, on Twombly and Rilke); ancient Greek (*Joachim Latacz*, Basel, on *Fifty Days at Iliam*); and Japanese studies (*Yoshinobu Hakutani*, Kent State, on Twombly's inscription of haikus). This interdisciplinary exchange is brought together with internal responses to working groups (*Armin Zweite*, Munich, on Twombly's Rose paintings in the Museum Brandhorst) and borrowings from Old Masters such as Titian (*Artur Rosenauer*, Vienna) or Poussin (*Henry Keazor*, Heidelberg).

Section IV is dedicated to the correlation between text and image and, concretely, the significance of text and textual quotation in Twombly's work. Twombly's literary inscriptions in the context of the image-text relationship are discussed (*Thierry Greub*, Cologne), as is his handling of the Narcissus myth (*Mary Jacobus*, Cambridge/Cornell) in the context of text and notational iconicity, discussed in exemplary fashion by *Martina Dobbe* (Bochum). *Martin Roussel* (Cologne) discusses Cy Twombly as the "painter of writing" described by Roland Barthes in his famous essays from 1979.

Personal encounters with the artist and person Cy Twombly conclude the volume. *Reiner Speck* (Cologne) details the genesis of his 1979 family portrait in Bassano in Teverina. *Nicola Del Roscio* (Rome) describes a trip taken together with Cy Twombly to Afghanistan in the same year.

With the title "Image, Text, Paratext," precisely those topics—"work," "inscribed quotations," and "titles"—are named that have repeatedly played a central role for Twombly and that constitute one of the hermeneutic "cruxes" of his works. As a result of the morphomatic-interdisciplinary orientation of the conference presentations, it has been possible to pose questions beyond the strictly art historical domain and to generate new insights into this complex artist's oeuvre. This book aims to provide access to Cy Twombly's associative and referential pictorial language by virtue of its interdisciplinary gaze and its expansive interpretations of famous works and cycles in all of the applied artistic media that Twombly employed.

For the opportunity of engaging in a morphomatic investigation of Cy Twombly's oeuvre and the recording of the conference presentations in the *Morphomata* series, my heartfelt gratitude goes above all to the two directors of *Morphomata*, Dietrich Boschung und Günter Blamberger. I

would also like to thank the contributing authors, particularly the Twombly specialists Gottfried Boehm, Mary Jacobus, and Armin Zweite, who have kindly made their texts available for the conference book. I would, however, especially like to thank the aforementioned contributors who are not art historians but who were prepared to venture an analysis of Twombly's complex work. I am also grateful for the contributions of Morphemata fellows Adriana Bontea, Petr Charvát, and Steffen Siegel.

I owe a debt of gratitude first and foremost to Nicola Del Roscio at the Cy Twombly Foundation (New York / Rome) as well as the assistants in Rome and Gaeta (Eleonora Di Erasmo, Raffaele Valente) for kindly securing image rights as well as providing additional support. Furthermore, thanks are due in particular to Heiner Bastian, Udo Brandhorst, Karsten Greve, Henry Keazor, Lothar Schirmer, Katharina Schmidt, Reiner Speck, Alessandro Twombly, as well as the Thomas Ammann Fine Art AG Zurich (Andrea Staub), Daros Collection, Fotoarchiv und Reproduktionsrechte Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen (Gabriele Göbl), Udo und Anette Brandhorst Stiftung (Renate Blaffert), Museum Brandhorst, Munich (Nina Schleif, Bianca Albrecht), the Gagosian Gallery New York / London (Chloe Barter, Mark Francis, Adele Minardi), The National Galleries of Scotland (Fintan Ryan), The National Gallery, London (Daragh Kenny and Charlotte Fujimura), the Windsor Castle, Royal Collection Trust (Agata Rutkowska), The British Museum, Marian Goodman Gallery, New York / Paris (Catherine Belloy, Marine Pariente), Dedalus Foundation (Katy Rogers), the Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern (Heidi Frautschi), bpk Berlin (Sabine Schumann, Katharina Gart, Jan Böttger), Keystone (Vanessa de Maddalena), SCALA Picture Library (Katja Lehmann), and VG Bild-Kunst Bonn (Eva Neuroth).

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The translators (Orla Mulholland, Daniel Mufson together with Ehren Fordyce and Timothy Murray) have done a great job. For the idea of publishing an English edition and for his support in doing so, I sincerely thank Nicola Del Roscio of the Cy Twombly Foundation.

I. TWOMBLY'S ARTISTIC CONCEPT

*I'm not a pure; I'm not an abstractionist completely.
There has to be a history behind the thought.*

Cy Twombly, 2007

RICHARD HOPPE-SAILER

CY TWOMBLY. PAINTERLY AFFINITIES

Taking an interdisciplinary approach to American artist Cy Twombly is a fascinating challenge. Throughout his considerable oeuvre, Twombly works time and again with various allusions to, borrowings from, and reflections upon artistic genres, lyric texts, and mythological tales. His work is described as hermetic and placed in contradistinction to the main currents of mid-twentieth century art. In actuality, however, he responds very sensitively to numerous inspirations, positioning himself in relation to his contemporaries as well as to classic modernist art history in a highly reflective manner.

Cy Twombly was born in Lexington, Virginia in 1928 and died in Rome in 2011. In the context of recent art history and all the related fields that participate in such interdisciplinary discourse, examinations of the American painter, sculptor, and photographer still provoke a series of methodical questions that should not be underestimated. Educated in the milieu of the abstract expressionists—for example at the Art Students League in New York as well as Black Mountain College—he had already made a name for himself among his colleagues from early on. In 1951 he had his first solo exhibition at Chicago's Seven Stairs Gallery. And in 1952/53, he traveled to North Africa with Robert Rauschenberg. From the start, the reception of his work was marked by controversy. Robert Motherwell, one of the leaders of the New York school, wrote a text in 1951 for Twombly's first exhibition catalog in which he emphasized the rawness, immediacy, and eroticism of his painting; years later, in 1964, Donald Judd penned a befuddled and mildly irritated response to a Twombly exhibition at Leo Castelli for *Arts Magazine*. In 1957, Twombly emigrated to Rome and had his first museum exhibition in 1965 at Paul Wember's Museum Haus Lange in Krefeld.¹

1 Regarding the various interpretive approaches to the work, cf.: Del Roscio 2002.

Not only is it noteworthy that Twombly already enjoyed international recognition from early on and that important art critics were grappling with his work, it is also remarkable that the early divisions among critics have endured to this day. In 1979, for example, Roland Barthes published two texts on Twombly's work that have long proven to be beneficially influential. For Twombly's painting, Barthes coined the apt notion of the "gauche," and he investigated the paintings' various aspects by explicating their materiality on the one hand and considering the legibility of the trace of artistic action on the other.² In contrast, Isabelle Graw wrote a review that based her negative response to a 2009 Twombly exhibition in Vienna in 2009 on the works' perceived lack of a sociopolitical stance. Her verdict culminates in the reprimand: "His pictures seem to me to be something for incorrigible believers in Art, especially because they [...] are devoid of any explicitly sociocritical dimension."³ What at first sounds tentative concludes with the clear statement: "Once again, the mythical idea that the artist lives in a world of make-believe takes flight. It is probably for that reason that his paintings remain peculiarly blind to the fact that social constraints also prevail within them."⁴ Behind this criticism, one finds the attitude that, as the critic correctly observes, is explicitly shunned by the artist: It is the hope for an updated Modernist art whose iconology can be clearly decoded. It is not just this expectation that Twombly frustrates; beyond that, his art postulates the thesis that this category of response is fundamentally misplaced in the context of his images. This occurs within a very deliberate, painterly process that not only refers in various ways to the history of painting qua painting but also incorporates the manifold iconographic threads of the tradition with superlative subtlety. By playing with these traditions, and by doing so upon the canvas of painterly process, he was, at the same time, deconstructing their legibility within the horizon of an iconology that is traditionally differentiated within art history. And here, we have identified the central methodological problem. Painting that constantly refers to literary, historical, and mythological sources repudiates, in its execution, the art historical analytic methods that are apparently appropriate for these sources.

Perhaps it would be helpful to consider Twombly's allegedly isolated position within the context of the 1950s and 60s. In doing so, we would simultaneously pursue the question of how related artistic questions are

² Barthes 1991, 163–166.

³ Graw 2011, 437–438.

⁴ *Ibid.* 441.

discussed within the framework of Abstract Expressionism and how, unavoidably, the status of the image within a frame of reference that is at first glance literary is to be considered at the same time. As a result, surprising parallels are revealed that raise related, methodological problems for art history. I would like to discuss these connections by way of three points of comparison: to the works of Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell, and Jackson Pollock. The selection of these artists is not arbitrary. The discussions will demonstrate how the artists use their subjects and conceptions of painting to explore themes that are utterly comparable. Questions concerning the relation between image and text will play an equally central role, for example, in the exploration of the material and process of painting.

Willem de Kooning, born in the Netherlands in 1904, left the old continent to emigrate to the United States in 1926. He thus charted the reverse course that Cy Twombly would take from the U.S. to Europe in the 1950s. In New York, de Kooning joined the emerging art scene—with Jackson Pollock, Arshile Gorky, Sidney Janis, Barnett Newman. In 1948, he taught at Black Mountain College, where Twombly also spent some time.

Around 1945 came *Pink Angel* (ill. 1), which shows affinities to Twombly's artistic concept. An apparently seated figure dominates the image, with a long, snakelike neck that curves at the upper right edge of the frame and almost reaches to the center of the painting. This pictorial movement responds to a strong, repeatedly broken motion from the right that seems to jab out at the figure's throat, or in any case to attack it. While de Kooning connects the tumescent, colored forms to his composition via their contours and contrasts them to a network of rectangular lines, there are repeated overlaps and formalistic border violations. This painting shows the tensions and transitional phenomena that develop when an artist tries to safeguard the representative power of both the figurative and the abstract and when his premise is that neither of these modes should take priority. At the same time, the picture demonstrates how such a subject can be realized within the style of action painting. The painting style is not latent; on the contrary, de Kooning exposes it. In doing so, he not only renders the painterly action visible, but he also integrates the incidental elements such as dripping paint and uncontrolled smudges of color as components of the image. The result is a layering in which the view of previous conditions and prior painterly gestures is unconcealed. As a result, the painting obtains a plural time structure. Time is not only legible in the immanent movement of figurations; time also becomes legible in the traces of a painting style, in the visible action



1 Willem de Kooning: *Pink Angel*, ca. 1945, oil and charcoal on canvas, 132.1 × 101.6 cm, Los Angeles, Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation

of painting. Ultimately, time is thematically embedded within the history of the painterly process that, as a result of such painterly procedures, is itself vividly present in the picture and becomes comprehended in the observer's act of seeing. The painting carries its history and integrates it so that it can be viewed within the structure of its composition. Processuality is the theme and content of the image—an observation that points to parallels in Twombly's work.

Perhaps the godfather of this conception of painting is Paul Klee, who also created a series of angel drawings that skirt the border between figurative and nonfigurative shapes. At the same time, there are also parallels to Picasso's figures and even to Titian's *Diana and Actaeon* from 1556/60 (ill. 2). In this respect, we can by all means speak of an eclectic form. But de Kooning doesn't limit himself to eclecticism, although he



2 Titian: *Diana and Actaeon*, 1556–1559, oil on canvas, 188 × 206 cm, Edinburgh, National Galleries of Scotland, NG 2839

absolutely stands by his eclectic process; he modifies these sources and searches for a figuration that exists on the border between abstraction and figuration.⁵

It is not surprising that questions are raised within such an aesthetic concept regarding the revelation of the pictorial structure and the search for traces. In other words, to the extent that production is a visual theme here, it is tied to the investigation of the act of reception in other works. A painting such as *Excavation* (ill. 3) from 1950 makes this clear. In *Excavation*, de Kooning refers directly to the tendencies of an abstract expressionism

5 Cf. de Kooning's statements from 1972 in a conversation with Harold Rosenberg in *De Kooning: Paintings 1960–1980*. Kunstmuseum Basel 2005, 129–141.



3 Willem de Kooning: *Excavation*, 1950, oil and enamel on canvas, 203.5 × 254 cm, Chicago, The Art Institute of Chicago

strongly influenced by action painting and *peinture automatique*. Nevertheless, his approach to this process is not only determined by the concept of the presentation of an immediate trace of action but also by the idea that a temporal phenomenon is etched into the process of painting. In other words, this process of painting, in which various relics, mimetic traces, codes, and art-historical quotations are deployed on all levels, must be legible and, ideally, reversible. Thus, the painting's title primarily refers not to an actual excavation and its finds but rather refers to the vivid process with respect to such a painting. The perception is directly linked to a notion of the archeological excavation, with the removal of layers, with a reading of the ground of the painting. De Kooning requires the viewers of his paintings to engage in the activity of reconstruction. He calls for the immersion in the traces of paint and the particles of form not as a meditative immersion but rather as an act of productive appropriation.

This is particularly evident in *Excavation*. In the large-format painting, we recognize a structure in which the light layer of color consistently offers a view of the colorful forms that lie beneath it. The strong emphasis

on line throughout the entire composition leads to the conjecture that one is dealing with remnants, with slivers of figuration that can only be partially discerned but that, upon closer examination and an “excavation into the body of the painting,” permit themselves to be recognized. In these linear systems, de Kooning is clearly working with allusions to figurations—for example, in the upper left area of the picture, where the profile of a face can be made out. Once such a manner of interpretation unfolds, one begins to search the entire picture for hints of figures. Even if the search doesn’t lead to any clear results, this point of view durably structures the entire perception of the image. This is the pictorial location of a new interaction between objectivity and abstraction, even if the objective references are extremely obscure, as they are here in *Excavation*. In 1950, the same year that *Excavation* was made, figurative aspects clearly enter the foreground in de Kooning’s work in the form of an utterly clear figurative theme: the representation of the female in his famous series *Women*, whose first work, *Woman I*, is dated 1950–52.

This series of representations deeply preoccupied de Kooning, and in public they are connected with his oeuvre in a special way. It is not surprising, then, that he, too, spoke of the motives and especially the difficulties that, for him, were associated with this search for form. In an interview with David Sylvester for the BBC in 1960, he describes, ten years after *Woman I*, the production process for these paintings. In doing so, he draws on the old topos of describing the creation of a painting as an animalistic, or sexual, act: “The *Women* dealt with the image of women that was painted in every epoch, all these idols [...]. It had an effect on me: It abolished composition, arrangement, relationships, light [...]. I painted it in the center of the canvas because there was no reason to put it off to the side. I thought I could also stick to the idea that it has two eyes, a nose, a mouth, and a throat. I proceeded to the anatomy and felt as if I was almost becoming aroused. [...] The *Women* became an obsession for me in the sense that I wasn’t able to get a handle on them. [...] For me, it wasn’t about getting a particular kind of feeling. I look at them now, and they strike me as loud and wild. I think it comes from the idea of the idol, of the oracle, and above all from the exuberance.”⁶

This interview excerpt makes clear how intensely de Kooning was grappling with the subject. It reveals a not insignificant essence of his aesthetic.

6 Willem de Kooning, interview with David Sylvester, BBC 1960. Qtd. in exhibition catalog: *De Kooning*. New York / Berlin / Paris 1984, 276–277.

It is striking how he repeatedly insists on the concepts of the idol and its related physiognomic details, such as the grin and an almost Dionysian glee. Here, his interest in analyzing the act of painting is particularly connected to the subject. For de Kooning, both have apparently archaic roots and are strongly tied to notions of sex and sexuality. An additional significant fact for him is the grappling with the motif that he can not “get a handle on,” the motif that defies him. We will reencounter the processuality inscribed in this material and the images’ complex temporal structure in Twombly’s works. Looking at the entire oeuvre, one finds another surprising parallel. In de Kooning as well as Twombly, one can observe an explicit sexualization of the painterly process, perhaps harkening back to their confrontation with Surrealism. Vis-à-vis Twombly, Robert Motherwell had already pointed this out in his early review from 1951.⁷ With de Kooning, one finds it directly inscribed in the subject of the *Women*; with Twombly, it is not only in his adaptation of antique myths but also in the graffiti-like abbreviations in pictures treating a variety of subjects.

Robert Motherwell (1915–1991) is one of the preeminent figures of the New York School. Motherwell, likewise considered to be a theoretician for the Abstract Expressionists, showed himself to be strongly influenced by Surrealists Max Ernst, Yves Tanguy, and André Masson. Together with Harold Rosenberg, he published the magazine *Documents of Modern Art* and edited an important anthology on Dadaism. In our context, Motherwell’s work comes across as a painting based—in a most complex manner—on literary sources. As a result, one can very precisely observe processes of transformation in both text and image that are also significant for Twombly’s works.

In 1949, Robert Motherwell painted the first of a series that would come to comprise 150 works. It bore the title *Elegy to the Spanish Republic*, inspired by Federico Garcia Lorca’s 1935 poem, *Lament for Ignacio Sánchez Mejías*, written in memory of a toreador who died bullfighting. The series of paintings Motherwell created in reference to this text constitutes a highly distinctive adaptation of the poem and is closely connected to Motherwell’s early, Surrealism-influenced works. Since it is neither an unmediated illustration nor a clear political statement—which wouldn’t have been surprising given the outcome of the Spanish Civil War 1936–39 and the engagement of American intellectuals for the Republic—one must ask, then, what the meaning of this painting is.

7 Robert Motherwell: Stuart Brent presents Cy Twombly. In: Writings 2002, 14.



4 Robert Motherwell: *At Five in the Afternoon*, 1949, casein on cardboard, 38 × 51 cm, New York, Helen Frankenthaler Collection

In 1949, a small-format work on composition board was created, called *At Five in the Afternoon* (ill. 4), which clearly has that rigorous formal vocabulary found in the series *Elegies to the Spanish Republic* and can be seen as a precursor to the series. In it, one also finds the direct reference to Lorca's poem, which Motherwell retrospectively sets in relation to the events of the Spanish Civil War. The four-part elegy begins with the verses:

At five in the afternoon.
 It was just five in the afternoon.
 A boy brought the white sheet
at five in the afternoon.
 A basket of lime made ready
at five in the afternoon.
 The rest was death and only death
*at five in the afternoon.*⁸

8 "Lament for Ignacio Sánchez Mejías." Trans. A.S. Kline: *Poetry in Translation*.

Motherwell cites these lines in the title of his painting. The time, “at five in the afternoon,” is repeated in every second line of the first part of the elegy, leading to an utterly haunting lyrical style that heightens the awareness of death’s negation of time and life all the more by naming the exact moment. The question of how Motherwell transfers the idea of this elegy into painting leads to the heart of interdisciplinary considerations. Because the allusion does not arise as a direct textual reference, it has to reveal itself in the structure of the image.

Between the black bars that vertically divide the visual field, oval, equally black forms have been inserted that seem wedged, almost squashed, into place. The entire formation seems to hang in its space, even as it shapes the space itself. The severe, vertical composition is disrupted by a slender, horizontal box on the upper right, durably unsettling the structure. The forms themselves do not have sharp borders; they are frayed, and the transitions between the black shapes and white background are fluid in a few places. They have no connection to the frame; they hang in the visual field. At the lower edges, the paint seems to be dripping out of them. Not least because of this feature, the impression of suspension is linked to the peculiar combination of menace and helplessness. Perhaps the oval forms are also directly referring to Lorca’s poem, where it says:

Death laid its eggs in the wound
at five in the afternoon.
At five in the afternoon.
*At just five in the afternoon.*⁹

Thus, the painting’s range of connotations and associations is expanded to include another aspect and, at the same time, refers very specifically to the lyric text. Myriad meanings are exploited in a complex interplay of forms and for their intra-pictorial potential for expression. This potential for expression include the contrasts between black and white, the greatest contrast in painting; the contrasts between oval, organic forms and the severe system of the angular bars; and, finally, the tension between the immediate style of brushstrokes and the compositional system at the heart of this series. It is the tension between emotion and ratio, between

Accessed 23 June 2016. <http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Spanish/FiveintheafternoonLorca.htm>.

⁹ Ibid.

immediate action and the contemplative deployment of the medium, between unmediated experience in visual perception and the symbolic field of associations that characterizes the works. For Motherwell, this model has a universal and, at the same time, highly individual appeal, and he is constantly finding new ways to investigate and interrogate it in a large number of variations. "The *Spanish Elegies* are not 'political,' but my private insistence that a terrible death happened that should not be forgot. They are as eloquent as I could make them. But the pictures are also general metaphors of the contrast between life and death, and their interrelation."¹⁰ Thus, the universal and the private become simultaneously vivid in the image. The specific adaptation of Lorca's text by Motherwell is both the prerequisite and the framework for this treatment of death as a motif viewed in its individual as well as societal and political perspectives. We find similarities here to Twombly, who also makes reference to numerous textual sources as well as art historical predecessors in his paintings, transforming them into a distinct pictorial language that alludes to Motherwell's concepts as well as Jackson Pollock's affinities.

In 1943, Jackson Pollock created a large format work titled *Guardians of the Secret* (ill. 5). In the vividly colored painting, nearly figurative shapes appear that, upon second glance, immediately dissolve to form themselves anew. In the center, like a picture within a picture, the structure of the entirety is condensed in front of a light background. Black lines are recognizable on a surface alive with color; they look like the scriptural shorthand of an alien, unknown text. Energetic codes marked with a lively drawing style are concentrated in the lower section, while bright colors dominate to the upper right and left. In the upper, central section of the inner image, we imagine we can recognize fishlike forms. But the forms and markings never solidify; they float—indeterminate, vague, and mysterious. In a few places, black loops reach into the light pictorial field from below and link with the inner form by surrounding it. To the right and left, this central area is closely integrated into the overall composition of the painting. An ornamental strip serves as a border; figurative shapes surround it on both sides. A mask appears at the upper left, and it finds its response on the lower edge in the form of a prone, zoomorphic figure.

10 Robert Motherwell, exhibition catalog, Smith College Museum of Art Northampton. Massachusetts 1963, n.p.



5 Jackson Pollock: *Guardians of the Secret*, 1943, oil on canvas, 123 × 192 cm, San Francisco, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, © Photo SCALA, Florence

This is all integrated into a clear format of multiple frames in which open lines and wild traces of color are inscribed. Repeatedly, our gaze is directed to the innermost, light pictorial field and, upon longer viewing, the totemic figures on the right and left become ever more salient. In those years, as was the case with many of his American colleagues, Jackson Pollock took an intense interest in European Surrealism as well as in the myths and art forms of North American indigenous cultures. At first, such interests seem quite disparate, and yet in the painting they are surprisingly connected. The unifying element is an innately artistic device, namely the style of the line and the manifestation of color. In this painting, they are immediate, wild, and spontaneous. Pollock acquired this process of painting that is wild and spontaneous, almost automatic and unconscious, from the Surrealists, and the idea of a direct relation to nature was something that fascinated him in the myths of indigenous peoples.

The goal of this artistic work lies in the visualization of the immediate act of painting amidst a suppression of reflection and criticism that is as sweeping as possible. Here, the artist reifies himself at great risk. The direct line and the vigorous brushstroke become an expression of his

artistic individuality. Just as this may occur unconsciously, it may not, however, succeed without a system and rules. In every action that still seems unconscious, one finds, again and again, relics of memories, prior knowledge, and intentions. The picture is dealing with these indissoluble contradictions between what is rational and irrational. The codes in the central field of the picture point to the idea of writing and language; the figures hint at visions of totems and refer to mythical forms. Regular is opposed to irregular, but it is all integrated into the form of a painting which itself appears to be doubled as a picture within a picture. Thus, the painter reflects the conditions of his painting in the act of painting itself. His subject matter is that of the picture and a form of recognition and he shows the immediacy of his painterly action, which can be tamed within the image. The wildness and freedom of the unconscious and mythical—according to one theory of this art—finds its expression in art, and art is the appropriate form of perception for myth. In it, these contradictions, enigmas, and fundamental strangeness become clear. This doesn't happen in a narrative, like, for example, that of Narcissus and Echo, or Diana and Actaeon, but rather in the form of the image—in the act of painting itself.

This look at the artistic concepts in Cy Twombly's milieu is helpful in providing a more precise context for his work and in answering the question of how Twombly's work can be discussed in the context of iconographic, iconological, and culturally specific literary questions. The examination of Motherwell and Pollock has shown how literary and mythological ideas inscribe themselves in an abstract visual agenda.

In Twombly's oeuvre, there are also a large number of works that deal with the question of how, after the history of abstraction, it is possible to make reference to the old pictorial themes of myth.¹¹ When paintings with allusions to landscape are observed, this occurs because it is precisely in landscape painting, far removed from more traditional and textually determined subjects, that methods of abstraction can be successfully demonstrated. At the same time, these paintings by Twombly reveal an interest in the history of art and his process of adapting it, and they are suited to the explication of an aesthetic concept in which ideas about process play a central role. This is where the methodological problem described at the outset arises: The representational elements of

¹¹ Hoppe-Sailer 1985.

the paintings recede to the background; their significance to the evocation of landscape or mythology is set aside in favor of the investigation of the process of a *natura naturans*, or they are critically considered in a traditional manner in terms of their potentially iconographic content.

Looking at Twombly's large format painting *Bay of Naples* (ill. 6) from 1961, it is difficult, at first glance, to see the association with landscape. Twombly's composition builds upon a broad base, soaring upwards to the right, its yellow, rose, and blue toned color scheme forming clear red and brown accents. The accumulation of paint in the right half of the picture allows no obvious relation to things, while on the left side, just above a blue color field, a horizontal bar appears that enables orientation within the picture in a manner completely comparable to that of a horizon in a landscape. While the open structure of Twombly's paintings seldom provide a clear direction for interpretation, in *Bay of Naples* such a direction is in fact offered. Starting with the left side of the picture, one is confronted with two visual elements that—if one assumes that the picture is a variation on landscape—are highly significant. This is as true for the indication of a line of horizon that simultaneously contains a directional value as it is for the blue patches of paint running over the entire field of the painting, sometimes more concentrated, sometimes more diffuse, which can be read either as water or sky. The composition begins quietly and cautiously in order to create a clear escalation and intensification towards the right side of the image. The shaded reds at the center become clearer, their style more expressive. Ultimately, the directionality of the composition changes: The horizontality of the horizon contrasts with the stark, vertically oriented formal arrangement of the right side of the image, which paraphrases the edge of the painting there and finishes off the composition—and not without playing with forms of closure and opening on the outermost margin. The composition is clearly oriented to the visual field; it does not continue or expand beyond its borders. Nevertheless, Twombly takes the theme of borders so far that individual elements allude to their potential of being exceeded. As a result, a specific play on proximity and distance, detail and totality is opened.

With respect to Twombly's works, it has been repeatedly pointed out that their singularity lies in the oscillating tension between reference to objects, textual communication, and the free deployment of form. Perceptible traces of an inscription can also be found in this painting, at its exact center and beneath the blue brushstrokes in the lower right section. Pursuing this trail, one might wonder if the allusion to landscape goes beyond the vivid suggestions of local color or a horizon line, beyond the



6 Cy Twombly: *Bay of Naples, Rome*, 1961, oil paint, oil-based house paint, wax crayon, lead pencil on canvas, 241.8 × 298.6 cm, Houston, The Menil Collection, Cy Twombly Gallery



7 Johann Christian Clausen Dahl: *Two Men on a Terrace in the Gulf of Naples*, 1820, oil on canvas, 14.7 × 28.6 cm, Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

texture patently resulting from a painterly process; might Twombly possibly be hinting—in the manner itself of constituting an image—at the modes of aesthetically constituting landscapes, and at how this has been historicized in art discourse? The Gulf of Naples is a place of the most intense longing for Romantics and late Romantics in a circle that includes Karl Friedrich Schinkel, Jacob Philipp Hackert, Oswald Achenbach, and Karl Blechen. In a particularly self-reflexive Romantic form, the Norwegian painter Johann Christian Clausen Dahl—a friend of Caspar David Friedrich—had demonstrated this with his small-format painting *Two Men on a Terrace on the Gulf of Naples* (*Zwei Männer auf einer Terrasse am Golf von Neapel*) (ill. 7) on the occasion of a voyage to Italy in 1820. This isn't to pursue any thematic history, because one would then have to also mention Vesuvius or the specific phenomena of light characterizing the location that has always been of great interest to the artists. All that is being suggested is that Twombly, in choosing the title of his painting, was not only aware of these contexts but was also explicitly referring to them. At the same time, in the realization of the painting, he undertakes everything possible in order to avoid such a direct thematic or iconographical allusion. For a self-reflective approach dedicated to such a concept, there's also a painting such as Clausen Dahl's *Two Men on a Terrace on the Gulf of Naples*, in which, comparable to several of Caspar David Friedrich's works, the reflective approach to seeing landscape is treated thematically.

Just as the landscape depicts an ever changing aesthetic grasp of the entirety of nature and renders it legible and tamable, every visual figuration singles out an aesthetic area from the entirety of the visual world for the purpose of creating a distinct positing of meaning. Nature strikes the observer as an open field in which by seeing, he creates order. These orders may be of various types. They may proceed according to the pattern of subordination; they may also capture the breadth of a landscape in a paratactic series and define it as an extract that is subject to constant change. In his composition, Twombly offers the viewer a vivid reenactment of these modes. In doing so, he deliberately forgoes the prioritization or singling out of particular locations or geographical determinations.

Even more radically than *Bay of Naples*, Twombly's 1960 painting *Sahara* (ill. 8) demonstrates such a paratactic structure whose sweeping renunciation of color enables a remote reference to the eponymous location. By revealing these structures in his paintings, Twombly renders the pattern and process of his composition discernible. He thus not only attempts to evoke an impression of a landscape but rather at the same



8 Cy Twombly: *Sahara*, Rome, 1960, lead pencil, oil paint, wax crayon, colored pencil on canvas, 200 × 275 cm, Private Collection

time shows the structure alluded to by it, just like that of the medium in which the allusion becomes clear.

If the reflex for landscape occurs in a mode of abstraction, the diverse aesthetic processes can be released as themselves because, while they are bound to thematic expectations, they are repeatedly defying them. When landscape becomes a subject of paintings of this type, a doubling of pictorial strategies takes place. Landscape itself is already a pictorial strategy. Just as landscape qua landscape is generated aesthetically, namely in the mode of the painting, an abstract and above all nonrepresentational figuration is primarily perceptible aesthetically—also in the mode of the painting—and is capable of being imbued with meaning. Otherwise, it would be almost entirely indeterminate. The painting *Sahara* demonstrates the polyvalence of the concept of landscape as well as its diverse modes of visual perception. Here, systematizing graphic forms on the right margin are associated with free variations as much as with clearly sexual innuendos that connect the reference to location beyond topographical suggestions with diverse associations that make clear that the constitution of location and landscape is not solely a geographical matter—rather, it is, to the highest degree, profoundly individual.

With Twombly, nature resembles landscape, not only in the metaphorical sense of a topography of significations but also directly as a landscape structure in the sense of an extremely idiosyncratic generation of images. The delineated forms of a radical openness in pictorial structure, coupled with a simultaneous, internal, high degree of perceptual complexity, are the prerequisite for such a process; it is the allusion to a potential infinity and the emphasis on the gesture, on a process that Roland Barthes, in his reflections on Twombly, brought to the foreground and characterized with the concept of the clumsiness (*gaucherie*). This is the only guarantee that the viewer will grow aware of his own role in constituting the landscape in the form of a productive appropriation of the pictorial structure. Twombly's paintings show how landscape originates in the act of elemental visual perception that, at the same time, imagines objects of nature as well as their potential for metamorphosis, always carrying its own history of aesthetic appropriation. In other words, landscape in Twombly's paintings does not primarily bring to mind images of memory that are rich in associations; rather, it initiates a process of visual perception that is, in structural terms, intimately related to its object.

From this artistic concept, a far from trivial claim is made on the equally creative accomplishment of the viewer. That is, from the outset,

the viewer must resort to the seductively dangerous path of a visual reading that, given the at first glance naïvely childlike scribbling, stands in danger of provoking a disdainful visual approach and, should the gaze become fixed this way, fulfilling the prejudices of such visual expectations. The works by Twombly that have been introduced here provide access to their pictorial meaning only when the viewer, seeing himself, takes part in the interplay between compositional micro- and macrostructures and thus, retracing the painter's gestures, is prepared to enter the open field of meaning that the painter has conceptualized.

Twombly thus can be placed in the North American artistic movements of the 1940s and 1950s that, strongly influenced by European Surrealism, were working on the development of a distinctive pictorial language in the charged territory between figuration and abstraction. The artists are not primarily interested in a non-representational formal language; rather, they are attempting to integrate various literary and art historical sources into their works in a critical manner. The works arising from this process reveal an acute awareness of the power of cognition possessed by their own methods. They lead the viewer to what is on his part a self-reflective reception that in turn participates in the elaboration of this complex, sensorially critical painting.

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ADRIANA BONTEA

CY TWOMBLY: PAINTING AS AN ART OF THINKING

Twombly's artworks were not among those which shaped American art criticism in the 1960s and 1970s. Clement Greenberg's and Michael Fried's preferences instead went to Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, and Frank Stella. These choices echoed the uneasy situation faced by the art criticism of the time. Confronted with the reality of a painting that dissolved the little that remained of representation after the Impressionist and Cubist episodes, art criticism required fundamental revisions of terminology and criteria of evaluation. It was only by undergoing such changes that art criticism could keep its mediating role between the public and the artists and continue to educate the eye. The main task of Greenberg's and Fried's writings was to provide a positive assessment of American Modernist art since Pollock while moving away from the very norms upon which art history and criticism had been built. The adjustment involved the deliberate indifference to questions that could not be answered in terms derived from the medium of painting alone.¹ Hence their emphasis on issues of "flatness," "opticality," and "openness," of "shape" and "syntax," all terms which became central to the new critical approach devised to convey the meaning of American abstract art. The selection of painters was based on their ability to face and renew those

1 The positive evaluation of modern art as emphasizing form over content was inaugurated at the beginning of the last century by Roger Fry's appreciation of artists such as Cézanne and Van Gogh, whom he labeled "Post-Impressionists." The American formal criticism developed subsequently by Clement Greenberg and later by Michael Fried produced a set of objective criteria against which the painters' work could acquire its positive value, which is 'to be judged, in retrospect, to have been necessary to the finest modernist painting of the future' (Fried 1998, 17).

challenges of painting, which started with Manet's canvases and which was about to be reformulated now, no less provocatively, by American abstract art.

Because of the critical scrutiny to which it had been subjected and the cognitive interest it elicited², abstract painting turned out to be the strongest testament to the survival of painting as art.³ Its prominent role within the contemporary American art scene was secured by new conceptualizations and served the elaboration of untried terminologies. As Fried put it, the references to the few often quoted painters and sculptors coincided with his own viewing experience guided by abstract art. His art criticism contained both a response to these works and an elucidation of that experience: "one's experiences of works of art are always informed by what one has come to understand about them."⁴ By championing painters and paintings concerned to a great extent with the relation and conflict between shape as a fundamental property of objects and shape as a medium of painting, Fried sought to base the experience of painting on the "demand that they hold as shapes. Otherwise they are experienced as nothing more than objects."⁵ Abstract painting became synonymous with painting itself.

In this context, Twombly's artworks appeared foreign—not so much because the artist settled in Italy in 1957, but because the meaning and power of his paintings and sculptures were neither limited nor exhausted by the possibilities of these media alone. Speaking about his works, Twombly admitted that his art productions did not fit that trend of American Modernism by which art achieved 'purity' by eliminating from the specific effects of painting any and every possible borrowing from the medium of any other art.⁶ "I'm not a pure; I'm not an abstractionist completely. There has to

² It elicited this interest by describing the viewing experience, which led to the opposition between art and objecthood, between shape as medium of painting and shape as property of objects, between the literalist or theatrical use of support and the abstract use of it through the medium of shape (Fried 1998, 27).

³ In 1981 Claude Lévi-Strauss published a famous article in the journal *Le Débat* entitled "Le métier perdu du peintre." It describes the crisis of painting as art since Manet and affirmed the slow disappearance of the painter's craft (Claude Lévi-Strauss: *Le métier perdu*. In: *Le Débat* 10 [1981], 5–9).

⁴ Three American Painters: Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, Frank Stella (1965). In: Fried 1998, 215.

⁵ Fried 1998, 151.

⁶ Clement Greenberg: *Modernist Painting* (1960). In: Ibid.: *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. by Clement Greenberg and John O'Brien, vol. 4: *Modernism with a Vengeance*. Chicago 1993, 86.

be a history behind the thought.”⁷ If a trend in recent art was to achieve meaning by an open and obvious engagement with the restrictions of the support while forbidding any attempt to refer the problem to any other compartment of art, Twombly’s visual work addressed concerns shared with both the art of writing and the art of thinking. Because the art of writing, like visual art, belongs simultaneously to the process of seeing and thinking, it adds new dimensions to Twombly’s work. It is at once visual and intellectual. Moreover, Twombly’s work offers a good vantage point for reconsidering the relationship between seeing and thinking to the extent that his art attempts to attach a temporality to the act of seeing.

The presence of scripts and scribbling incorporated into the works’ surface demands that these works be viewed, alongside forms and colors, as sets of marks. As is the case with abstract shapes, writing proceeds by the configuration and arrangement of various lines and emphasizes the support on which it rests. Yet in this case the support does not allude just to the plane surface of the canvas. Whole paintings, drawings, or sculptures themselves shore up the writing. Individual letters (V for Venus; A for Achilles, cf. p. 141, ill. 4); names which became work titles (*Virgil* [1973]; *Narcissus* [1975], cf. pp. 416, 418, 423, ill. 2–4 and p. 426–427, ill. 6.1–6.2; *Orpheus* [1979], cf. 336, 338, ill. 7–8); and lists of words (*Venus* [1975]; *Apollo* [1975], cf. p. 66, ill. 7), sentences, or longer texts are an intrinsic part of the visual artwork. The writing of letters, words, and sentences supplements linear forms obtained by drawing and shapes produced by color or created by sculpture. In *Untitled* (1972; ill. 1), for example, the text at the bottom of the canvas leans in the same direction as the brush strokes of blue, white, black, and yellow. It reads: “The secrets that fade will never be the same.” Does this mean that the darker hues in the middle fade away towards the edges of the canvas? The wording appears on a clearer and less worked out surface. It is distinctly marked at the top by a horizontal, washed out line and at the bottom by the edge of the canvas. The text here, like *Wilder Shores of Love* (1985), inscribed at the top of the painting in crimson and leaning diagonally alongside the slopes of the brushwork, has its own graphic space on the pictorial surface. The inscriptions are written with capital and lower case characters, at times disjointed, and they highlight a common ground between painting and writing. Twombly considers them beyond their differences and outside their respective histories. What interests him is their shared ability to

7 London 2008, 50.



1 Cy Twombly: *Untitled*, Munich/Rome, 1964/1972, oil paint, wax crayon, lead pencil on canvas, 200.3 × 260.3 cm, Los Angeles, The Broad



2 Cy Twombly: *Untitled (Bacchus)*, Gaeta, 2008, acrylic on canvas, 317.5 × 468.3 cm, London, Tate, Presented by Cy Twombly Foundation

evoke a presence, his presence, in the world. In a short statement from 1957, he wrote: "Each line now is the actual experience with its own innate history."⁸ Lines achieved by drawing, painting, or writing proceed like ramifications branching out from the common stem of experience. They outline experience and track its history while making a record of it. Referring to this act of presence, Pierre Restany identified Twombly's scribbling with the notation of a tempo: "Expressing nothing but himself—that is fluctuating rhythm, contradictory, secret and esoteric, of the creative act."⁹

Yet, given Twombly's later comments, writing and scribbling are at once notations and pulses of a vital rhythm. Speaking about the *Bacchus* series (2005–2008; ill. 2), showing big loops of vermillion acrylic paint that suggest writing exercises from handbooks on calligraphy, he said: "These were all done in a couple of months. It was just very physical."¹⁰ The canvases record the movements of the body, whereas the dripping shows its position in respect to the working surface. The reference to the Greek god of wine and frenzy, Bacchus, in the context of the Iraq war turns into an image of unrest in which writing and painting borrow shape and color from each other, presenting a superposition of sanguine gestures written in blood. The calligraphic aspect of these flowing paintings in which the color soars, drops, or drips down emphasizes that the painter's gesture is not only a response to political matters in terms particular to his craft but also an apprenticeship of one's own awareness to events. Moving between painting and calligraphic strokes, the *Bacchus* series generate a field of electrifying energy whereby the intensity of feeling is matched by the saturated red color spread out and distributed on rows of spirals. A recent display at Tate Modern in London gathers three of Twombly's *Bacchus* paintings alongside sculptures under the generic exhibition title "Energy and Process."¹¹ It is no surprise that one of the most revealing

⁸ Twombly 1957, 32.

⁹ Quoted in Leeman 2005 (Eng.), 35.

¹⁰ London 2008, 50.

¹¹ Part of the Tate Modern Collections, focusing on one of the pivotal moments of twentieth-century art history, the displays in "Energy and Process" present artists' interest in transformation and natural forces. Room 7 is dedicated exclusively to Cy Twombly's paintings and sculptures. Among them, *Untitled* (1987, cf. p. 327, ill. 2) is a fine example of writing used on three dimensional art objects. Here, the handwriting adds one more layer to the folded structure of the holding structure while the text notes a newly achieved understanding derived precisely from the artist's craft: "And we who have always thought of

interpretations of Twombly's artistic practice still, in the beginning, comes from a poet. Charles Olson, then professor at Black Mountain College, where the artist spent time in 1951 and 1952, sees in painting and writing a common endeavor to cast one's own presence in the world:

Take it flatly, a plane. On it, how can a man throw his shadow, make this the illumination of his experience, how put his weight exactly—there? (In my business it comes out how, by alphabetic letters, such signs and their syllables, how to make them not sounds but *my* sounds, *my*—what are not any more sounds than is a painter's objects or a dancer's movements—my “voice”; to say what I got to say, or which may be of interest to others because it can stand for what they have got to say, if it says anything; and it can only to the degree that, like a plane, it is no plane at all.) How make that plane, the two dimensions, be all—from a point to any dimension?¹²

Twombly's scribbles fulfill the same role as Olson's poetic meter. Reminiscent of Emerson's “breath,” a close equivalent to the life of things, the *Projective Verse* (1950) called for a meter originating in the poet's breathing and for an open construction that was supposed to supplant syntax with sound. Olson opted for metrical variations based on breath. The poem's rhythm, however, was not only perceptible to the ear. It was also distinguishable in the graphic arrangements of lines and sections. *The Kingfishers* (1949), for instance, displays multiple patterns of verse and stanzas and aligns them in various ways by taking advantage of all dimensions of the support not just the vertical plane of the page and the horizontal direction of the writing. In addition to its aural dimensions, the poem also acquires a visual configuration. Such arrangements of the poem's lines were precisely ways to undo the plane geometry of the page and to reconstruct it so that it provided a vantage point for all dimensions of the poem.

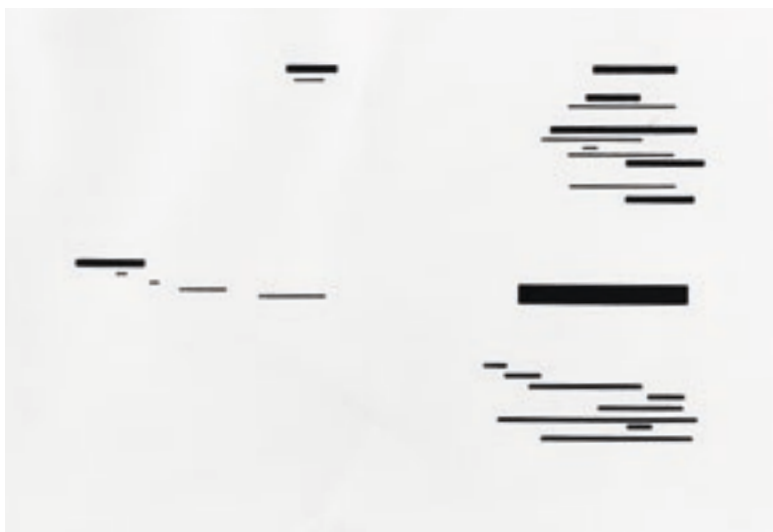
In his own writings, Olson was continuing a project started by Mallarmé. *Un Coup de Dés Jamais N'Abolira Le Hasard* (1897) was supposed to be published according to an exact layout and typographic design, also using free verse to highlight the large amounts of blank

happiness climbing, would feel the emotion that almost startles when happiness falls.”

12 Charles Olson: Cy Twombly (1952). In: *Ibid.: Collected Prose*, Donald Merriam Allen, Benjamin Friedlander, and Robert Creeley (ed.). Berkeley 1997, 175; see also Del Roscio 2002, 9.



3 Stéphane Mallarmé: *Un Coup de Dés Jamais N'Abolira Le Hasard*, Paris, Gallimard, NRF (1914)



4 Marcel Broodthaers: *Un Coup de Dés Jamais N'Abolira Le Hasard*, Artist's book on twelve aluminum plates, Wide White Space Gallery, Antwerp 1969, MOMA

space—the starting point of all dimensions, including that of poetry. Olson had the sense to have accurately placed Twombly's work in this tradition which he, the poet, shared with the painter. Later, Twombly himself would evoke Mallarmé while thinking about the various appropriations of whiteness: "Whiteness can be the classic state of the intellect, or a neo-romantic area of remembrance—or as the symbolic whiteness of Mallarmé."¹³ In his white paintings of the mid fifties (*The Geeks*, cf. p. 59, ill. 3; *Academy*, cf. p. 458, ill. 1; *Free Wheeler*, all from 1955), Twombly used industrial house paint to minimize the distinction between ground and motif; with pencil and wax crayon, he challenged the opposition between painting and drawing through scribbling, lettering, and shaded lines. Moreover, in his painting *Herodiade* (1960, cf. p. 63, ill. 5), a title borrowed from one of Mallarmé's unfinished poems, Twombly transcribes directly on the painted ground several lines among splashes of colors, hashed pencil lines, and summary drawing; all are evocative of the capital punishment of Saint John the Baptist, the poem's main character. One sentence in English enclosed in a box seals the painter's relationship with the poet: "I have known the NAKEDNESS of my scattered dreams."

Yet there is another aspect of Mallarmé's disposition of *Un Coup de Dés* that seems to have grown into Twombly's work. Intended as a book, the poem spans over twenty pages. In the 1914 edition that respected the author's precise guidelines, each pair of consecutive pages opposite to one another is to be read as a single panel (ill. 3). The usual dimensions of the text, top to bottom and left to right, are supplemented by the simultaneous reading of two pages, along irregular lines that form uneven blank spaces. Alluding to the last sentence of the poem, "Toute Pensée émet un Coup de Dés" ("Every Thought issues a Throw of Dice"), Valéry treats the poet's worksheets of 1897 as a transcript of thought. The graphic layout of the poem gives a material configuration of thought and, like a network of constellations, provides a diagram of thought:

It seemed to me that I was looking at the form and pattern of a thought, placed for the first time in finite space. Here space itself truly spoke, dreamed, and gave birth to temporal forms. Expectancy, doubt, concentration, all were visible things. With my own eye I could see silences that had assumed bodily shapes. Inappreciable instants became clearly visible: the fraction of a second during which an idea

13 Twombly 1957, 32.

flashes into being and dies away; atoms of time that serve as the germs of infinite consequences lasting through psychological centuries—at last these appeared as beings, each surrounded with a palpable emptiness... there in the same void with them, like some new form of matter arranged in systems or masses or trailing lines, coexisted the Word!¹⁴

After hearing the poem read to him by Mallarmé in a monotonous voice, Valéry looked at its disposition on the page. It was at this moment that he grasped the poem's meaning. It rests, according to Valéry, on the careful arrangement of lines giving concrete shape to a train of thought while outlining a pattern or a figure of thought (*la figure d'une pensée*)¹⁵. This visual configuration of thought (embedded in the graphic layout of the words and groups of words), spread out on the white support, takes precedence over both the semantic and grammatical linguistic structures. Valéry's notes on Mallarmé, dated shortly after the composition of the poem, if they had not suggested to Marcel Broodthaers his reworking of the poem, they already showed the independence of syntax from the elements that governed its initial invention. In an artist's book published in 1969 (ill. 4), Broodthaers maintains the exact layout of the 1914 edition of the book-poem and replaces all words with black stripes of different widths that correspond to the typographic layout created by Mallarmé. By removing the words, the Belgian artist reduced the poem to its sole graphic outline and thus turned it into a visual work whose significance, as in Valéry's reading, does not depend anymore on words, but on the variable proportions between white space and black stripes. The artist's book keeps the original title, but it changes the subtitle by replacing "poem" with "image." The painter's interest in the means of the poet focuses on the liberation of meaning from the pre-existent sense of words and on text's capacity for highlighting the white support on which it rests; its silence is not absence but part of the thinking process. Broodthaers placed Mallarmé at the source of modern art because he unwittingly invented modern space. Twombly, like Mallarmé, was aware that each presence masks something that is absent, something that is taking shape while being concealed by the presence of what we see or read. One way in which painting records the "history behind the thought"

14 Stéphane Mallarmé: *Collected Poems*, a bilingual edition, translated and with a commentary by Henry Weinfield. Berkeley 1995, 265–266.

15 Paul Valéry: *Le Coup de Dés. Lettre au Directeur des Marges*. In: *Œuvres*, vol. I, Jean Hytier (ed.). Paris 1957, 624.

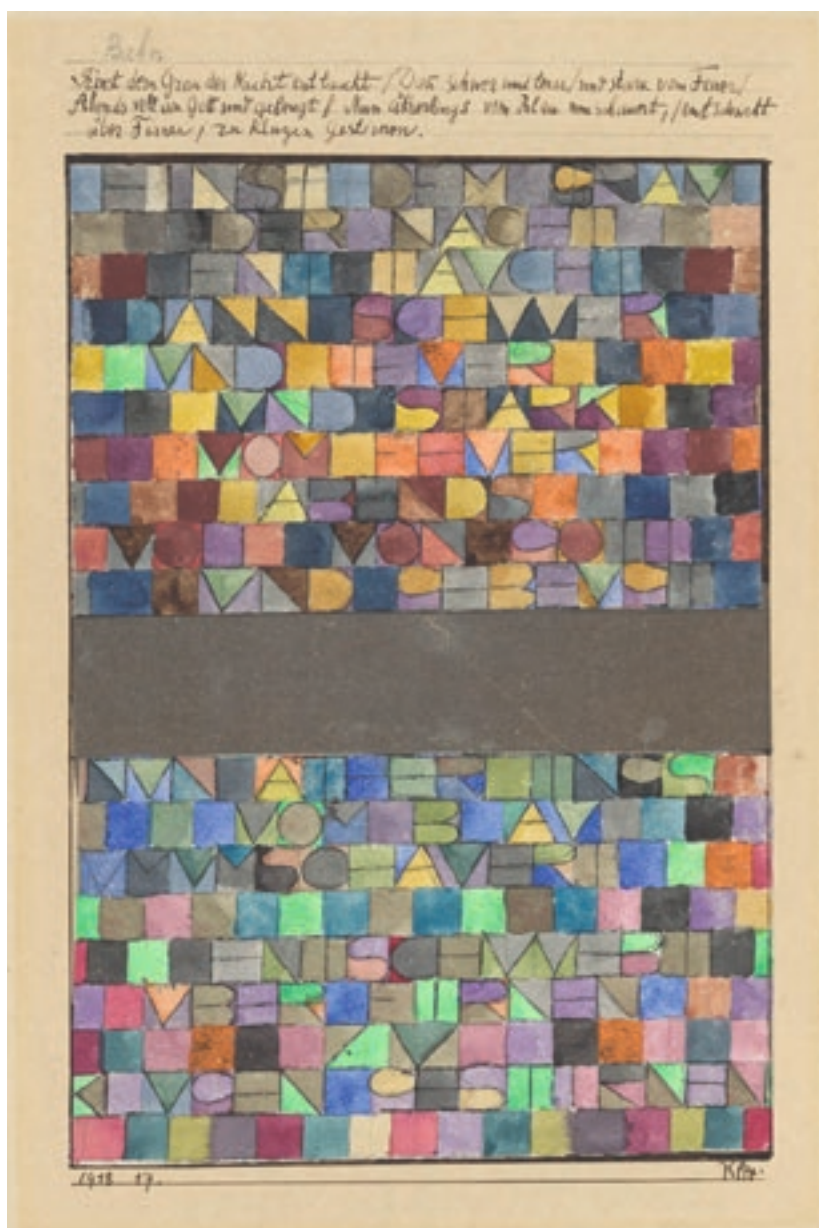
is by keeping all kinds of records of its pathways: erasures of drawings, words, or sentences like the written line in *Achilles Mourning the Death of Patroclus* (1962), reworkings of past paintings (*Olympia*, 1957, *The School of Athens* 1964) or transpositions of poems into both painted images and inscriptions (*Untitled*, *Peony Blossom Paintings*, 2007 and the *Roses*, 2008.)

The handwriting and scribbling in Twombly's works might well be considered a response to Klee's concept of form-making. *Gestaltung*, according to Klee, is a process characterizing both visual arts and writing. "When I write the word wine with ink, the ink does not play the primary role but makes possible the permanent fixation of the concept wine. [...] The word and the picture, that is word-making and form-building, are one and the same."¹⁶ In his artistic practice, Twombly echoes Klee, who also introduced letters, numbers and arrows in his paintings, as well as hand-written texts on the painting support. *Einst dem Grau der Nacht enttaucht* (1918) is at once a watercolor and a poem (ill. 5). On the top of the cardboard to which the watercolor is attached, the poem is transcribed in well formed cursive letters, while the letters of the two stanzas separated by silver paper constitute the composition. The shape of letters provides a grid for the colored patterns. Klee establishes visual analogies here between letter forms and the chromatic distribution of colors. By using letters to differentiate among colored shapes and by considering letters from a visual perspective attentive to the distribution of colors, Klee envisaged the relationship between painting and writing as analogous, symbolic systems and he experimented with the effects of their juxtaposition. Such an approach would have a fundamental and long lasting impact on the constitution of modern rationalities emerging during the Second World War and developing since.¹⁷

Twombly appropriates the analogy between form-making in the visual realm and form-making in the act of writing and displays their similarities on the very surface of his works. If they are able to assimilate

16 Paul Klee: *Notebooks. The Thinking Eye*, vol. I, translated by R. Manheim, J. Spiller (ed.). London 1961, 17.

17 Klee's works are discussed by Walter Benjamin in his thesis "On the Concept of History" (1940) in order to remove the presentation of history from narrative patterns and to constitute it into a figure of thought that is a measure of the present moment (*Denkbild*). And Merleau-Ponty draws abundantly on examples from Klee in his last essay, "Eye and Mind" (1961), where he proposes a new relationship between the visible and the invisible, liberated from perception and sense data.



5 Paul Klee: *Einst dem Grau der Nacht enttaucht* (Once Emerged from the Gray of Night), 1918, work no. 17, watercolor, pen and pencil on paper, 22.6 × 15.8 cm, Bern, Zentrum Paul Klee

the writing techniques into drawing and painting, it is because all of them are hand gestures governed at once by art and experience. The association of these techniques of the hand is based on the ability to produce a lasting record of a mood or affect. They provide the fabric of experience to which correspond the plotted lines of works, including the graphic lines executed by means of writing. Barthes was right to use the term *ductus* to characterize Twombly's handwriting.¹⁸ He borrowed the word from palaeography in order to describe the artist's handwriting as pure gesture. Yet this consideration of the path the hand travels cannot be separated from the account of the other lines in Twombly's work. If the writing appears clumsy and left-handed (*gauche*)¹⁹ it is not because it eliminates any reference to the artist's craft. Nor does it refer to the emancipation of the hand from mind. On the contrary, the *ductus* conveys an activity of the hand whose motion registers thought movements and by doing so it outlines its history. This journey of the hand is quite close to the definition of line that opens Klee's *Pedagogical Sketchbook*. In the first paragraph, he notes: "An active line on a walk, moving freely, without a goal. A walk for a walk's sake." It is illustrated by a serpentine line that traces the forward shifting of a mobile point.²⁰ Similarly, rather than showing the independence of hand from thought, the path of Twombly's handwriting presents thought processes devoid of intention. Wandering or persistent thoughts take shape and become visible in the works' compositions. The task of the composition is to register and outline states of mind and affects while experiencing them. Execution here is one and the same thing as composition. The juxtaposition between letters and painting and their association based on their equal efficiency in the production of form since Klee enabled important revisions in respect to the expressive character of language. If "like a painting, a novel expresses tacitly" as Merleau-Ponty put it,²¹ it is because authentic language, i.e., the inventive language of literature or philosophy, takes shape in the process of experimentation by indirect means. Similar to painting, the purpose of a novel is not to expose ideas but to make them exist in the same way that things do. Different from Surrealists' experiments that also equated

18 Roland Barthes: *Cy Twombly: Works on Papers* [Non multa sed multum]. In: Barthes 1991, 164.

19 *Ibid.*, 163–166.

20 Paul Klee: *Pedagogical Sketchbook*. New York 1972 (1953), 16.

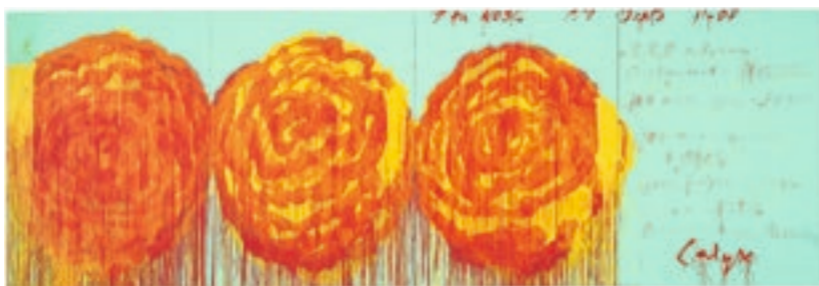
21 Maurice Merleau-Ponty: *Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence*. In: *Ibid.*: *Signs*, translated by Richard C. McCleary. Evanston 1964, 76.

writing and gesture, yet made possible by them, Twombly's lettering and scribbling also throw into relief something other than the usual meaning of words. The practice reveals the visual power of language lingering beyond its verbal use and turns it into a new dimension of painting.

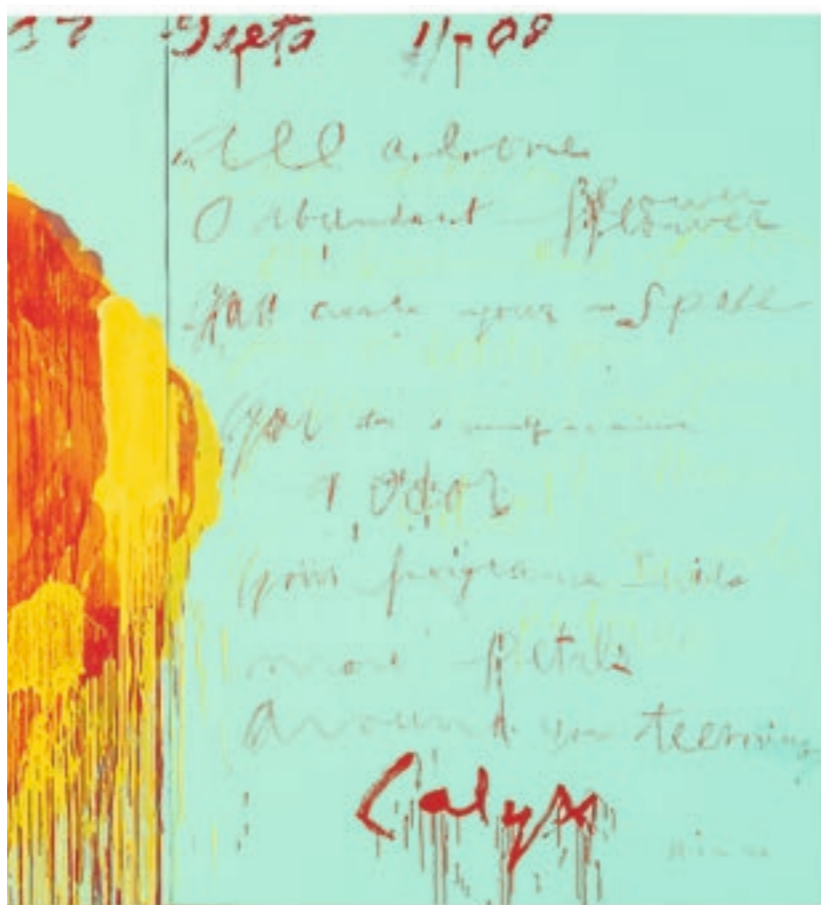
In the aforementioned interview with Nicholas Serota, the artist stresses the close link between the poetic use of language and visual art: "I never really separated painting and literature because I've always used reference."²² Yet reference, as he himself clarified on several occasions, means above all the clarification of reminiscences that fold and unfold, a working of the mind pondering over a quotation or poetic image. They are references because they refer to other artists and other minds, but for the artist at work they have become something to go for, a kind of electric impulse: "I need, I like emphasis... I like something to jumpstart me—usually a place or a literary reference or an event that took place, to start me off. To give me clarity or energy." For the artist who, like Klee and Olson, sees literature and visual art belonging to the same human activity of form-making, texts are at the same time powerful events that leave their imprint on thought and focus it. The old belief in a perceptive moment occurring before it is shaped into a literary or visual form is replaced by the conviction that perception already involves the creation of forms, that seeing is to see according to something—a boat on the sea, a summer heat, or a line from Catullus or Archilochos. For Twombly, literature is perception organized into an efficient expression that grows into the act of painting and accounts for the intensity of thought involved in it.

Poetic lines provide not only an orientation of thought, but also call for a visual configuration to be constructed on the canvas. The move from verse to image in Twombly's work is a visual construction by which a feeling or idea hosted by literature is perfected until it reaches that intensity in the visual realm that set the artist to work in the first place. Among the many instances in which painting grew out of literature, Twombly, who used to study his works thoroughly, considered the *Roses* cycle the most effective: "I like poets because I can find a condensed phrase... My greatest one to use was Rilke, because of his narrative, he's talking about the essence of something. I always look for the phrase." Here, the transcription of stanzas from Rilke's poems, like the writing in pencil mentioned before, is an intrinsic part of the composition. In each of the paintings consisting of four wood panels, the first three panels present

²² London 2008, 50.



6.1 Cy Twombly: *The Rose (II)*, Gaeta, 2008, acrylic on four wooden panels, 252 × 740 cm, Potomac, Glenstone



6.2 Detail of 6.1, Cy Twombly: *The Rose (II)*, 2008, Potomac, Glenstone, right part with a quote from Rilke

three intensely colored roses in full bloom while the fourth contains the verse inscriptions.²³ Twombly juxtaposed form-making by painting and form-making by writing on the same bright turquoise background while extending the pictorial field with a section written in paint. The paintings are a vivid testament to the intensity of feeling associated with the poems. Concentration of color and shape have the exact and immediate correspondence in the recorded lines. Similar to Mallarmé's verses in which Broodthaers saw the emergence of a new pictorial space where the properties of the blank support were emphasized and contributed to the meaning of the poem, the lines taken from Rilke convey a spatial configuration. The "essence of something" in the poems, which presumably refers to the blossoming of flowers, is relevant to the artist's work insofar as the poems present blooming as the creation of new space. Poem XV, which is transcribed almost entirely in *Roses (II)*, reads (ills. 6.1–2):

All alone
 O abundant flower
 you create your own space
 you stare at yourself in a mirror
 of odor
 your fragrance swirls
 more petals
 around your teeming
 calyx

In Rilke's poem, space is generated not by visual dimensions but by perfume, which extends space beyond the calyx of blooming petals. The paintings' overlaid texture and saturated colors recreate Rilke's image in a new dimension. The poet's figuration of space created by the far-reaching odor, dispensed by the heavily ruffled structure of a blooming rose, finds a visual equivalent. Twombly's paintings reenact overtly by means of paint and brush, as well as by virtue of their large size, what he calls the "narrative" of the poem. The subtle folding of Rilke's image centered on the qualifying adjective "abundant" becomes in Twombly's paintings the gracious unfolding of curved space compressed among the undulating lines that trace the swirl. Impossible to represent in words

23 See also Armin Zweite's contribution to this volume and p. 354, ill. 2.1–2.2, and pp. 362–363, ill. 3–8.

or pictures, perfume takes the role of an extended space shaped away from the object, quite close to the shadow Olson evoked to describe the poetic act. The accompanying writing is yet another way to formulate the expanse of space, by juxtaposing the painting and the history of the thought behind it.

ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

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3 Paris, Gallimard, NRF (1914).
4 Antwerp: Gallery Wide White Space; Cologne: Galerie Michael Werner, 1969.
5 © Courtesy Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern; Obj.Id. 4450; thanks to Heidi Frautschi.



1 Cy Twombly: *Untitled*, New York, 1954, oil paint on canvas, 73.8 × 91 cm, Basel, Kunstmuseum Basel, inv. G. 1982.28

GOTTFRIED BOEHM

CY TWOMBLY.

SITES OF TRANSFORMATION

BETWEEN CULTURES

In the later years of his life, Cy Twombly went public with works and expressive forms that shifted his artistic identity into a new light. One thinks, for example, of his sculptures, which Katharina Schmidt comprehensively made accessible for the first time in the Kunstmuseum Basel's memorable exhibition from 2000; but also of his photographs and, in general, of the transformation in appearance to which his painting was subject, including the monumental series of paintings that have cast anchor in the Museum Brandhorst in Munich.¹ If Twombly was often

¹ Cf. the catalog for the exhibition curated in 2000 by Katharina Schmidt: Basel 2000.—Regarding the rose paintings in the Museum Brandhorst, cf. the contribution by Armin Zweite in this volume.—Nicola Del Roscio has edited a representative collection of older texts on Cy Twombly in Del Roscio 2002. The series of large Twombly exhibitions (including Baden-Baden 1984, Bonn 1987, Dusseldorf 1987 and Zurich 2002 as well as Stuttgart 2011) has left a clear trail that has continually been worn more deeply. The catalogs mentioned, together with Heiner Bastian's overview in Bastian 1978 and his oeuvre catalogs of the paintings (HB I–V from 1992–2009), set out the works to which this essay makes reference.—This text is based on a lecture given by the writer in 2000 to the Association of the Friends of the Kunstmuseum Basel (*Verein der Freunde des Basler Kunstmuseums*) on the occasion of the Basel exhibition of Cy Twombly's sculptures. It reappeared lightly revised in the accompanying program to the Twombly exhibition in Stuttgart (2012). This version was redacted again for printing, admittedly without being able to consider the most recent literature on Twombly. The essay appears here on the express wish of the editor Thierry Greub.

still assessed prior to the turn of the century as an offensive artist, as an exponent of a provocative, because clumsy artlessness², then he now confronts us—and definitively so following his death—as a denizen of painting's Olympus. The Stuttgart exhibition project that brought him together with Monet and Turner also moved him, however, into the tradition of a European Colorism, whose contours are marked by names like Titian, Rubens or Delacroix.³ Whoever had already trusted the potential of this artist earlier feels confirmed, but also emphatically induced at the same time to ask whether or not Cy Twombly has remained the same in all his transformations. Can the late work still be understood from the foundations he laid in the 1950s and '60s? And looked at more closely, how are these foundations constituted? The old question of Cy Twombly's artistic concept has evidently not lost its currency.

One is well advised to recall Twombly's artistic origins. Against his American background, the European-Mediterranean orientation that distinguishes him emerges all the more vividly—that quite improbable encounter of the man from Virginia with the old cultures of the Continent and Middle East, including their further development. A trail of inspired ignitions traverses his oeuvre and makes itself perceivable in a plethora of culturally saturated names that encompass—among other things—poets, mythological figures and historical sites. Whoever articulates them evokes in the process that sphere of signification out of whose experiences his works create and to which they refer in titles or painterly scriptures. The unexpected return of such distant and temporally deep traditions in the work of an advanced artist appears thoroughly astonishing. At all events one feels reminded of literary parallels—in the work of Ezra Pound or James Joyce. The element of astonishment is strengthened further if one thinks of the paths that Cy Twombly's generational comrades travelled or those previously travelled by the early representatives of American post-war art. The pathos of an absolutely new start, out of which Barnett Newman (1905–1970), Jackson Pollock (1912–1956) and Mark Rothko (1903–1970), along with their comrades-in-arms (for instance Clifford Still, 1904–1980), lived and worked, pursued the goal of finding points

2 Roland Barthes in: Barthes 1991, for example under the keyword “scratching,” cf. *ibid.* esp. p. 179.

3 The exhibition *Turner—Monet—Twombly. Later Paintings* in the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart in Spring 2012 (Stuttgart 2011). Cf. also the essay by Artur Rosenauer in this volume.

of departure beneath and before all of culture and its fatal history, of establishing a moment of radical recommencement. Yet, Newman's metaphors of world creation, with which his work started, and his later recourse to the experience of the "sublime: now!"⁴ also wanted to provide the initial impulse for a genuine American culture that was to have cast off the narrow European dependencies and, as though in reference to the basis of one's own consciousness, discovered autochthonous, Native American cultures, for instance, those of the Northwest coast.

In 1952 Cy Twombly, equipped with a grant and together with his friend Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), had set out upon a long trip across Europe and North Africa. The possibility then dawned for him for the first time of not using the current horizon of the consumer world and its relics as an artistic sounding board, but rather of giving himself over to the spell of the cultures of the Mediterranean. He began to feel its resonances, while Rauschenberg and other artists of this generation reacted to the banal flotsam and jetsam of the everyday, integrated auto tires or chairs into expanded paintings or, like Jasper Johns, for example—a third in the trio—flags, beer cans, light bulbs, targets and so forth. Compared to this, the murmuring of names and words that Twombly sets in motion appears remarkable, as though originating from a completely different world. The murmuring is realized in numbers, letters and words, which are subject to a profound painterly adaptation and unfold in the process an *imaginary sound*. Were one to speak what one has read—aloud to oneself—e.g.: Adonais, Anabasis, Bacchanalia, Dionysos, Orpheus, Proteus, Parnassos, Venus, Arcadia, Homer, Sappho, Virgil, Rumi, Montaigne, Valéry, Rilke, Duino, Gaeta, Bolsena and so forth, then it becomes quite tangible to what extent Twombly placed emphasis on *implementation*: how he strove to make mythological or poetic *evocations* visible—not infrequently also including verses—out of the painterly. Whoever is familiar with Twombly's works, is acquainted with their *mute sound space*. Since Kandinsky at the latest, we know more of that branch of 'sound' according to a visual and at the same time phonetic side.

The performative quality of these paintings—the resonances, allusions, associations and affects triggered by them—also contradicts the attempt to view and spell them out again in their conjured ancient world as an ossified educational backdrop. Twombly's art cannot be deduced

4 Barnett Newman: *Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. John P. O'Neill. Berkeley 1990: "The sublime is: Now!"

from iconographic references and is just as unsuitable as a quarry of erudition, as indispensable as it doubtlessly is to make oneself familiar with the facts and materials that they conjure. Here, uncalled, Aby Warburg enters the scene, who saw pictures through learned reconstructions and research acting *through and through* as “dynamograms”⁵, as effective quantities whose ability to “have an afterlife [*nachzuleben*]” were capable of mobilizing themselves suddenly and often centuries later. Their power releases the works from the chronological scale of the past, frees them from historicism’s distancing pressure and reactivates them directly in the world of the observer.

Twombly’s works testify to a hidden vitality that issues from a specific *kind of making* in his paintings and works on paper—for which, however, he also avails himself of a *sensual materiality*, with whose idiosyncrasies we are still not fully acquainted. It is sensual [*sinnlich*] in several ways: addressed to the *senses* [*Sinne*], but also oriented towards *meaning* [*Sinn*]. Mythological tales already operated across this span; moreover, they were not prude in fantasizing this sensuality outwards into passion, lust, violence, obscenity and the orgiastic. And Twombly, for his part, does not hesitate in activating these experiences, admittedly with means other than narrative ones. With what means we shall now see.

A natural consequence of his orientation consisted in his initially making his career in Europe. Living and working in Rome or other Italian cities, he also put down familial roots here. Only gradually did this untimeliness also find broad recognition in his native land. This resulted in a triumphal return in 1995 to an artistic home city dedicated only to him. The collectors of the Menil Collection in Houston, Texas, inclined for their part towards Europe, dedicated a building solely to Twombly, in which he is since presented continually and with his best capabilities.

THE GROUND AND THE SIGNS

Time after time, the attentive observer is compelled to ‘spell out’ Twombly’s works again or to ‘read’ them. It thus comes as no surprise that ‘writing’ or ‘script’ has been a preferred topic of discussion around this artist.⁶ What is meant are naturally not only *letters or words*, but *all kinds*

⁵ Ernst H. Gombrich: *Aby Warburg. An Intellectual Biography*. Chicago 1986, 244.

⁶ Roland Barthes in particular has interpreted Cy Twombly in terms of writing; cf. Roland Barthes *passim* (in Barthes 1991, 157–194).

of signs, whether it is a matter of enigmatic *abbreviations* of hidden meanings; sexual *symbols* that recall *graffiti* and suggest outlines of female or male sexual organs; notations, numbers or number sequences; geometric figures or mere *scribbles* and confused *lines*; or *flecks of color*, small tactile heaps of color or congealed runnels. What stands written: to read—so can this act of rapprochement be characterized. But then who says that writing is actually reserved for reading? Could it not be that we *see more*, if when reading we do *not* arrive at the *goal*?

For in fact the artist heaps up the greatest difficulties in front of any observer who tries to pursue this path. And even if one could identify the reference of this or that sign, how could the signs connect themselves into the sum of a text, these signs that the sum has strewn here and there across the surface? In any case painting is at issue, not the appearance of texts; Twombly has developed methods for pictorializing the legible in order, however, to also obscure, defer or condense his meaning in the process. For Twombly it is exclusively about making *his painting strong*.

The metaphors of reading is donned to lure the observer into a trap; nevertheless, this metaphors suggests—at least in Western art—that writing functions best when it ‘stands’ on a neutral bearer, for example, on the white standardized page of a book, is ‘set in type’ and ‘printed’ there. Then in any case, it fulfills the expectations connected with reading; namely, to bring the flow of information frictionlessly into motion. Stated differently: since the bearer of the meaning does not interfere in what is *written*, the bearer does not get in the way of the reader; as a general rule, the bearer is ‘overlooked.’ Our reading world consists of sequences of scripted distinctions, behind which the ground—which grants them a hold in the first place—fades devoid of meaning. Twombly undermines this conventional pattern of reception, even and precisely then when he brings the scriptural into play on the surface of the painting. He does not begin with the sign, but quite on the other end, the overlooked one: with the ground. Let us look at some examples.

Untitled (Kunstmuseum Basel), made in New York in 1954, already activates his dark ground, without yet creating the Mediterranean pictorial climate still unknown at the time to Twombly, which emerged only after his definitive settling in Italy in 1957 (ill. 1). An ochre-colored configuration rises out of a blackness that is beginning to brighten here and there, that shifts to the side, as though it has been caught by an invisible, dark force. Is this painting representing a sign to us? If yes: what kind, for what reason and of what? A gesture? A form that does not cease to free



2 Cy Twombly: *Criticism*, New York, 1955, oil-based house paint, wax crayon, colored pencil, lead pencil, pastel on canvas, 127 × 147 cm, Private Collection



3 Cy Twombly: *The Geeks*, New York, 1955, oil-based house paint, colored pencil lead pencil, pastel on canvas, 108 × 127 cm, Private Collection

itself from the forces of formlessness? In any case we encounter a ground that intervenes in order to express itself.

A group of paintings, likewise created in New York in 1955, including *Criticism* (ill. 2) or *The Geeks* (ill. 3), strikes another tone. For the first time we encounter the light grounds that have become characteristic for Cy Twombly, which he introduces in that year in order to allow a thicket of linear graphisms to emerge, one that does not simply exist, but appears before our eyes and at the same stroke disintegrates or, respectively, sinks back into the light. A *temporal ambivalence* comes into play, with which Cy Twombly has steadily worked subsequently and which has become a central characteristic of his concept. The ground of these pictures is thus no flat basis firmly joined to itself, but rather a fabric that is capable of articulating itself. Twombly understands it as a *site of transformation*, in a quite elementary sense. For out of material traces (whose qualities will occupy us yet), a signifying field of play emerges here, with which we associate the experience of vitality, which suggests those allusions, affects or associations previously referred to—in short: what one can call the experiential world of this art.

After 1957, this experiential world is saturated by degrees with elements of the Mediterranean. Twombly signals this in the titles of paintings, but more and more as well by means of signs within the paintings, for instance, in *Narcissus* (cf. p. 416, ill. 2 and p. 418, ill. 3), *Leda and the Swan* (ill. 4) or *Herodiade* (ill. 5)—all created in 1960, a year later followed by *The First Part* and *The Second Part of the Return from Parnassus* or *Empire of Flora* etc. In these, a discrepancy comes into effect between the height of the often mythological significations and the low, body-related, graffiti-like mode of representation. The temporal ambivalence is increased (not least of all by the contribution of partial overpaintings) by means of white flecks of color that erase what is already represented or force it back into the ground. Twombly proves to be an ambiguous master, who continually ‘primes’ [*grundiert*, tr. note: or also ‘grounds’] the lucidity of an intense, occasionally brilliant visibility; who exposes a painterly osmosis that communicates with the anonymous forces of disappearance or forgetting.

Twombly’s rediscovery of the ground is part of modernity in a quite specific connection, which we can only hint at here⁷—at best by refer-

7 On this cf. also Gottfried Boehm / Matteo Burioni (ed.): *Der Grund. Das Feld des Sichtbaren*. Munich 2012 and the discussions included there.

ring to a programmatic work by Stéphane Mallarmé that has proved to be extremely influential and stimulating. In his poem *Le coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* (1899), not only poetry is at stake, but at the same time its written form; i.e., the conditions of its visual appearance; technically speaking, its 'printed image' (cf. p. 42, ill. 3).⁸ Mallarmé attacks the text's linear order of lines, which seemingly inevitably underlies the succession of reading, by partially breaching it: above all by means of unexpected interstices and the use of different typographies. This has consequences on different levels: in terms of materials, an activation of the visual emptiness of the ground occurs, which above all forms new kinds of interstices (between the words, but also between the lines) and leads to a visible rhythm that draws semantic consequences along with it. The reader is capable of breaking out of the ordering of lines to read the page under specific iconic conditions. This leads to shifts in meaning for words marked specially in terms of typography, askew across the page and beyond the logical order of succession.

Doubtlessly, it was Mallarmé's idea to transform poetic meaning through the activation of the visual ground of writing, in equal measure experimentally as well as consequentially. It did hit a vein by the way, which has proven especially potent and fruitful within the productive crisis of the painting in modernity. Since the Impressionists and Cézanne, since analytical Cubism and the polyphonic invention of abstract painting by Kandinsky, Malevich and Mondrian, among others, not to speak of concepts such as monochromy, there have been repeated and entirely different attempts, via the *totum of the ground* and its force of articulation, to invest images with an entirely new powerfulness and with experiential forms as yet unknown.

Twombly can be situated historically and factually in this context. And the processes tied to this can be understood even better if one ventures a brief look to the side at John Cage, whose work would scarcely have been conceivable without Mallarmé. He was, incidentally, working at Black Mountain College, where Cy Twombly was also sojourning in 1952—to only this small extent we wish to discuss here the question of possible 'influences.' We are speaking of *Silence*, a work that is of interest because it treats the *visual space* of writing like a *sonic space*, which in this

8 Stéphane Mallarmé: *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Henri Mondor and Georges Jean-Aubry (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 65). Paris 1945: *Un coup de dés*, 457–477 and the commentaries *ibid.*, 1581 f. Paul Valéry was apparently the first to have heard and seen this poem (*ibid.*, 1582). Cf. on this point also the contribution of Adriana Bontea in this volume.



4 Cy Twombly: *Leda and the Swan*, Rome, 1960, lead pencil, wax crayon, oil paint on canvas, 191.3 × 200.6 cm, Onnasch Collection



5 Cy Twombly: *Herodiade*, Rome, 1960, oil paint, lead pencil, wax crayon, oil-based house paint on canvas, 200 × 282 cm, Private Collection

case is not painted, but articulated by means of musical compositional principles.⁹ Created in 1949 and printed in 1959, the literary form of a lecture underlies *Silence*, albeit a “lecture about nothing.” The words are organized according to a strict metrical order in four columns, each respectively into twelve lines that are in turn subdivided into 48 bars. This has consequences for the visual ground and through it on its effect, but also on the declaimed, audible text and its sound. What one hears is ‘grounded’ upon silence, or as it is put on the first page of *Silence*:

now		there are silences	But
words	make	help make	and the
silences	.		the
		I have nothing to say	
and I am saying it			and that is
poetry	as I need it	.	¹⁰

BODY AND GESTURE

One can hardly understand Cy Twombly’s conceptual foundations without passing through gesture, or stated more precisely: without speaking of the body as the actual actor of this painting. This has been spoken of repeatedly since Roland Barthes¹¹, and Cy Twombly himself has made some few remarks in this direction that refer us back to the instance of painting. But what does ‘body’ mean here? Does it not involve a trivial claim; after all, painting has at all times been a matter of hand, eye and head—to recall the three eminent bodily coordinates. But what changes with Cy Twombly? To speak as in a formula: above and beyond its enacting or, respectively, poetic role, the body gains a ‘foundational’ [*fundierende*] significance (lat. *fundus* = ground).

⁹ John Cage: *Silence: Lectures and Writings by John Cage*. Hanover, NH 1961, 109.

¹⁰ Ibid.; the section of the first lecture cited concludes with this sequence:

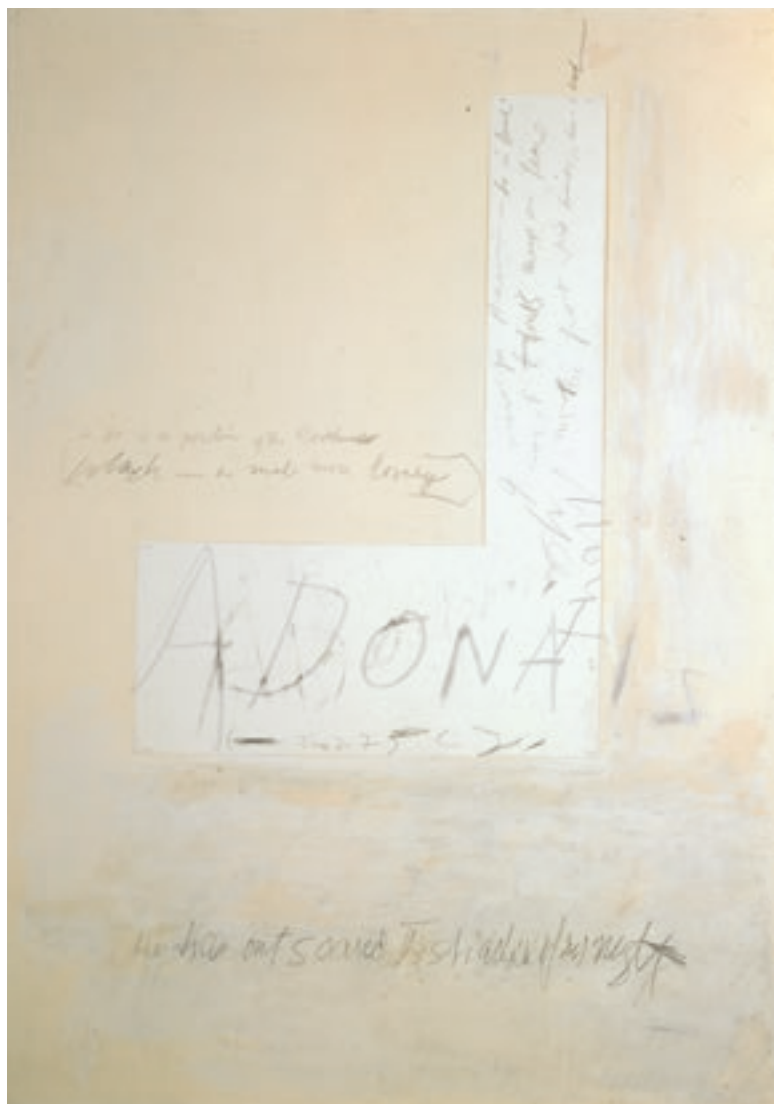
“This space of time / is organized

We need not fear these / silences,—”

but rather, as the next 12-line block of text says:

“we may love them.”

¹¹ Roland Barthes in: Barthes 1991, 160–161 and passim.



6 Cy Twombly: *Adonais*, Rome, June 2, 1975, collage: (drawing paper, staples), oil paint, wax crayon, pencil, 166.2 × 119 cm, Collection Cy Twombly Foundation



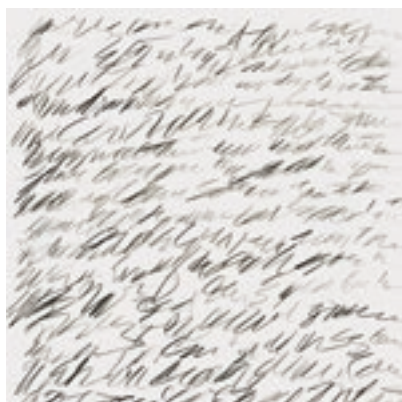
7 Cy Twombly: *Apollo and the Artist*, Rome, May 1975, collage:
 (drawing paper, cardboard, staples), oil paint, wax crayon, pencil,
 142 × 127.5 cm, Private Collection

This significance becomes comprehensible in the facture of the signs, not when one pays attention to degrees of deviation (from what norm?). Also not when one examines the 'open' form of the traces left by the artist or tries to spell them out again as representations of something or allusions. Something else is crucial for Cy Twombly, namely: his signs dispose of a characteristic line or visual tone in which an excessive bodily energy is operative. This implants itself in various ways, especially impressively so in those works of the artist that make reference to the order of script and writing, such as, for example, the 24 *Poems to the Sea* (1959, Sperlonga), the approximately 60 pages of the *Delian Ode* (1961, Mykonos), *Virgil I-IV* (1973), *Adonais* (1975, ill. 6) or *Apollo and the Artist* (1975, ill. 7)—all works on paper—or like the large and organized sequence of 38 pages with the title *Letter of Resignation* (1967), produced in a hybrid technique with oil-based house paint, wax crayon, pencil and paint.¹² The contents of the letters provide no information concerning the resignation spoken of there, for no conventional reading penetrates them. Yet we come to know quite well that resignation has to do with a waning of powers, about which 'letters' are of course composed: written, drawn and painted.

In this work Twombly records the formulary of the textual page, line order and handwriting (cf., for example no. XXXVII, ill. 8.4) in order to immediately undermine them. For example: through the illegibility of a characteristic handwritten line, its displacement into the graphic (no. XXV, ill. 8.2), the deformation of the word sequence into repeating, circular sweeps of lines (no. XXVI, ill. 8.3; no. XXXII), which he arranges in columns and prefixes with numbers. In one case (no. V, ill. 8.1), what is written has disappeared under a thick cover of white paint, erased to such an extent that only one script peeking out from the bottom edge refers back to it.

With the body and its gesture, the semantic content of the individual signs purges itself in favor of their energetic charge or discharge. The body of the artist remains completely invisible with respect to its appearance; it is not a matter of portraiture—even an indirect one. Rather, what finds lasting expression is perhaps what most distinguishes bodies, namely the manner of their vitality. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty has explicated, bodies are distinguished among all the events in the world in that they can *simultaneously* touch themselves and the thing, an elementary form of participation with a large register that reaches from the animalistic and

12 HB Letter.



8.1-4 Cy Twombly: *Letter of Resignation*, Rome, 1959–1967,

No. V, oil-based house paint, lead pencil, 25 × 24.9 cm;

No. XXV, lead pencil, oil-based house paint, wax crayon, 24.9 × 24.9 cm;

No. XXVI, lead pencil, wax crayon, 24.8 × 24.8 cm;

No. XXXVII, lead pencil, oil-based house paint on paper, 25.1 × 25.4 cm,

Private Collection

excremental, across desire and fantasy, on into the realm of cognition, the mythological and the mind. Consequently, the body's expression is by no means blind or immediate. It is endowed with an idiosyncratic, somatic difference; it is capable of articulating itself, i.e., to survey and at the same time structure that which is at stake. The bodily gesture draws on prevalent expressive formulas, like letter, writing, number, figure, schema and so forth, in order to endow it with an impactful tone that is not about 'meaning' in the conventional sense. Rather, body speaks to body: that of the artist—which manifests itself in the painting's space of resonance—addresses itself to that of the observer—who acquires a share in that with his or her corporeal existence and its registers.

This concept has consequences for our understanding of 'representation' or questions about method. If the painting and its title no longer refer to contents identifiable and accessible beyond the painting, then the old model that requires stable analogies between the painting and the world of references is rendered inoperative. As stated previously: what we experience cannot be reconstructed via iconography. It is also not a matter of the ample garments of aesthetic ambiguity, in which a fixed and possessable kernel of significance hides, revealed to the one who seeks it stubbornly enough. Instead, something else comes into force. We had spoken of sound, rhythm or resonance; these are based, as we can recognize now more precisely, on the enervation or excitability of the body, as fleeting, nameless or never spoken as it may be, revealing itself in this way in cultural ciphers or signs, in the saturated, Mediterranean world of these paintings.

THE WHITE INNOCENCE

In 1961 a Cy Twombly text appeared in German translation, which counts among the rare literary statements of his thinking processes.¹³ Its title reads: "*Malerei bestimmt das Gemälde* (Painting Defines the Image)" We raise it because it illuminates interesting aspects and is perhaps also capable of supporting the analysis posed. The text begins by elucidating the concept, surprising in this place, of 'innocence.' The first three sections are worded as follows (emphasis in italics—G.B.):

13 Twombly 1961, 62–63. [Ed. note: The translator is not named; I assume Manfred de la Motte.] The original version of Twombly's manifesto is found in New York 1994, 27.

If the reality of whiteness exists, then perhaps in the *duality of sensation* (as the multiple anxiety driven by desire and fear).

Innocence is white: it can be the classic state of the intellect, or a neo-romantic area of remembrance or the symbolic whiteness of a Mallarmé.

Now what innocence signifies and contains can never exactly be analyzed. But it is *the landscape of my actions*, and it must imply more than mere selection.¹⁴

What is being spoken of here? The author himself provides an initial indication when he speaks of the symbolic, white innocence of Mallarmé. We know from our analysis that it is a matter of the power of a light ground, strong enough in order to shift and influence the poetic signs and metaphors. We had characterized this analysis in terms of a difference immanent in the ground, and Cy Twombly marks it in his manner when he speaks of “anxiety [*Unruhe*]” (of “desire and fear [*Begierde und Furcht*]”) and of a “duality [*Zwiespalt*]”, a “duality of sensation [*Zwiespalt der Eindrücke*]”. In the third section, he describes “innocence [*Unschuld*]” for its part as the “landscape of my actions [*Landschaft meiner Handlungen*]”; in our vocabulary: as a site of transformation. But why does the description of the sphere of his painterly activity bear the name of “innocence [*Unschuld*]” at all? One is well advised not to counterpose ‘guilt [*Schuld*]’ to it. It is not about this alternative, but about the description of a condition of indifference that has not yet decided for something, that can still make its own choice for everything, thus a scenario of the future beginning, which can thus be described through the color white, that coloristic not-yet, which is able to unfold itself in its possibilities, in everything that brings about the painting as action. “Since most painting then defines the image [*Das Malen bestimmt das Gebilde*]”, it reads three sections later in the said text, “it is therefore to a great extent illustrating

14 Twombly 1961, 62 [trans. from the German translation:

“Wenn es eine wirkliche Unschuld gibt, so vielleicht im *Zwiespalt der Eindrücke* (als vielgestaltige *Unruhe*, die von *Begierde und Furcht* getrieben wird).

Unschuld ist weiß; sie kann der klassische Zustand des Intellektuellen sein oder ein neoromantischer Erinnerungsbereich, oder die symbolische weiße *Unschuld* eines Mallarmé.

Was nun *Unschuld* bedeutet und enthält, lässt sich nicht exakt untersuchen. Aber sie ist die *Landschaft meiner Handlungen* und sie muß mehr bedeuten, als bloße Auswahl.”].

the idea or feeling content of an image [*deshalb erklärt es weitgehendst die Idee oder den Gefühlsinhalt eines Bildes*].” The innocence is simply that characteristic potentiality of the not-yet, a condition of duality, in that sensations are transmitted here whose expressive form Twombly has found in an artistic structure that one can describe as a palimpsest. We mean the superimposing of layers, the erasures of older meanings, their being overwritten through new signs, etc. The hidden contains thus an underground presence; fills the painting with anxiety, with desire and drives. This finding can also be described with words such as sediment, latency or accumulation, which all imply potentialities that have not been differentiated or not completely so.

Twombly activates himself and the viewer by means of a “duality of sensation,” a flowing, oscillating interleaving. In this, a disquiet dominates that stimulates the imagination and wanders across its capacity, alludes to near or far; and this disquiet sets in motion the capability of memory. We have already discussed to what extent memory in Twombly invariably feeds on this duality: between appearing and sinking, manifesting and disappearing, between the vitality of a pictorial gesture and its fading away. It is a temporal duality that is couched in this painting ‘from the ground up.’ Twombly’s white pictorial grounds represent this wasting background of withdrawing or forgetting: they simultaneously erase and preserve. Incidentally, he now and then also inverts the polarity of this arrangement, uses dark grounds, for example, in the paintings reminiscent of blackboards, in which a circling gesture is repeated in an originary bodily reference, is communicated rhythmically (ill. 9). Before the undetermined continuum of the painting, the individual signs become visible by contrast. It is this contrast that permits the retaining of some things, the retrieving of others, in order thereby to structure the process of memory. If we were not able to forget so much, we would be the prisoners of an ossified presence, slaves to that which once was. The mythological discourse on Lethe as a river is found again in Cy Twombly’s works, for example, in the *Bolsena* paintings, characterized by a flowing diagonal (ill. 10).¹⁵ It manifests itself from the underground of the visible that dominates in all these works. Lethe: what is, however, also the visual ridge between appearance and disappearance, the edge of a *duality* on which visibility appears. And which also deploys memory.

15 Clearly recognizable in the *Bolsena* painting in the Basel Kunstmuseum (deposit of the Emanuel Hoffmann-Stiftung; HB III 93). Cf. also New York 1989.



9 Cy Twombly: *Untitled*, New York, 1969, oil paint, wax crayon, 76 × 101 cm, Cologne, Collection Prof. Dr. Reiner Speck



10 Cy Twombly: *Untitled*, Bolsena, 1969, oil-based house paint, wax crayon, lead pencil on canvas, 198×241.3 cm, Munich, Lothar Schirmer, permanent loan to the Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich

Already at another place and quite some time ago, we undertook to explain the concept of a “remembering vision” [*eines erinnernden Sehens*] in Cy Twombly.¹⁶ Its point of departure is a signifying tension between the capacity of subjects and that of objective outcomes in the world where many participate. Often memory painstakingly reclaims the lost. Sometimes it remains piecemeal. Much is entirely diffuse or hidden behind the vague perception that there must yet have been something there, its contours blurring. Nonetheless, there is much that acquires a great intensity, vitality and charisma; that becomes unforgettable. From literary works of the twentieth century, from Proust’s *Recherche*, Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Pound’s *The Pisan Cantos* or Mann’s *Joseph and His Brothers*, extremely diverse recourses to memory as a process of representation are familiar to us as well. Cy Twombly’s work can be placed among these. In it, a personal memory always corresponds with the collective space of remembrance of a time or culture. Thus the invocations of Cy Twombly, his litany of culturally saturated names and contents—spoken of at the outset—are based on his individual approach, and yet they simultaneously measure themselves on the experiences of many and on the anonymity of tradition. When Twombly invokes Apollo, Pan, Orpheus, Narcissus, Mars etc., they then permeate back through every transformation that he has wrought by means of his bodily action. “In painting it is the forming of the image; the compulsive action of becoming; the direct and indirect pressures brought to a climax in the acute act of forming.”¹⁷ An iconic parallelogram makes the visible and its meaning experienceable through the senses. Twombly remarks subsequently, “Each line now is the actual experience with its own innate history. It does not illustrate—it is the sensation of its own *realization*.”¹⁸ The “innate history” of a representation appears, mythologically charged, for example, summoned from the reservoir of an invariably dim recollection, in order to drink—thanks to its dynamic qualities in the bodily consciousness of a reflective subject—from the blood of the present.

16 Boehm 1987. English translation in Del Roscio 2002, 180–190, the term *ibid.*, 187, and discussed at a general level: Boehm 1985.

17 New York 1994, 27.

18 *Ibid.* (Emphasis by the present author.)

ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

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1 Cy Twombly: *Cy Twombly with painting box + umbrella of Charles Woodbury*, Ogunquit, MN, 1944, 43.1 × 27.9 cm, dry-print on cardboard

STEFFEN SIEGEL

DISTANCING OF ABSTRACTION. CY TWOMBLY'S PHOTOGRAPHIC GESTUS

I

A young man is sitting in the open air in front of an easel (ill. 1). The paintbrush almost still touches the canvas. In the moment, however, the painter appears to have interrupted his work on the painting to assure himself about the model of his subject. It may well be a depiction of a landscape that he is sitting at. Yet anything more detailed is lost in the shot's blurriness. Even the age of the man can be estimated only with difficulty. At most he is in his early twenties, but presumably somewhat younger. His attire is timeless in any case, at all events betraying a certain restrained elegance. The painter has fastened his gaze in concentration on a point outside the pictorial space. And precisely here, in his dark eyes, lies that concentration, for which his otherwise scarcely strained posture gives little evidence. If one views this photograph as a whole, it is striking how carefully the picture is composed. Nothing is superfluous here. Each detail of this shot is shifted precisely into the form of the oval portrait. In the middle section, easel and painter are both equal actors of the scene. In the upper and lower curves of the oval, however, the shot evaporates rapidly into blurry brightness. Parasol and grass consist here of scarcely more than sparse flecks—as though the image is supposed to gradually fade out in these areas. Noteworthy in this photograph is the caliber with which the play of light and shadow is condensed into a picture. In old masters' sepia, the background flickers like a lightly waving water surface full of flares. In clear contrast to this, the face of the painter under the brim of his hat comes forward. The searching glance of the artist can be discerned in this way as the actual focus of the shot. Photography, literally understood, is a painting with light. The lowly role-portraiture of a

painter at his canvas can recall precisely this. In the process, the scene itself is, admittedly, hardly more than conventional. A brief side-look at the countless self-portraits of the French Impressionists reminds one of this. And, indeed, the picture even seems to appear precisely from this period of the waning 19th century. Possibly it is a matter of a slightly belated example of those calotypes that, as one of the earliest photographic processes, point back to the beginnings of this medium?

Yet in fact, it is quite different: This picture originates in the year 1944 in Oquonquit. It shows Cy Twombly from Lexington (Virginia), just having turned sixteen at the time, just at the start—or, strictly speaking, just before the start—of his remarkable artistic career. This career, meanwhile, has attained a level of esteem at which it has become possible to put his name in a series next to those of William Turner and Claude Monet.¹ If one looks at this early evidence-become-image of Twombly's artistic activity, such a comparison seems even less surprising. The sixteen-year-old American takes a seat before his camera in a pose that lacks nothing in old-masterly attitude. Indeed, it appears as though someone wanted to test out a classical artist's gesture here. And this perhaps even, as Hubertus von Amelunxen supposed, as an ironic play with long handed-down "photographic atavisms"?² Yet such observations are gained from subsequent viewing. And they hardly occur without knowledge of those specific forms with which Twombly endowed his painterly oeuvre. For as much as this work, relative to its subject matter, is a debate carried on with classical themes of art history, it equally distances itself, relative to its forms and styles, from the painterly style of the Old Masters.

If, three and a half decades after the creation of the photograph of the young painter at his canvas, Roland Barthes at the opening of his essay *Non multa sed multum* formulates apparently simple, nearly naïve-seeming questions, then within this resonates at the same time the experience of that difference that is opened between the 1944 pose-made-into-picture and the later painterly work: "Who is Cy Twombly [...]? What is it he does? And what are we to call what he does?"³ Meanwhile, beyond Barthes, numerous interpreters have tried to give answers to such questions.⁴ And the diversity of approaches admittedly makes it impossible to bind these into a common perspective. Yet all the same, in all an

1 Stuttgart 2011.

2 Amelunxen 2011, 171.

3 Barthes 1991, 157.

4 For an initial overview see Del Roscio 2002.

overlapping interest exists in Twombly's continually newly interpreted relationship of line and surface, grapheme and color. None of his paintings appears to wish to deny the presence of the draftsman, nor of the painter in front of the canvas. On the contrary: however unclear, blurry and distanced it may be, the body of the artist is assumed in all these paintings as the condition of an expression become manifest.

With a view to Twombly's paintings, Barthes speaks of a "blur," a "blotch" and a "negligence."⁵ It was the Canadian photographer Jeff Wall who made such observations more conceptually pointed. He formulated lucidly: "Twombly did not want anything mechanical to appear in his art."⁶ As diversely as the themes and as differently as the formal solutions in the individual pieces may be constituted, one aesthetic premise is the same in all the images: Twombly's paintings and drawings are negations of technical pictoriality. And again it was Wall who, in his situating of Twombly's artistic work, drew attention quite rightly to the point that owing to this antiquatedly appearing onesidedness, the work has long experienced and still experiences both large agreement and decisive dismissal. Yet, there is a blind spot that is irritating in Wall's observations. For as accurate as his accentuation of a pictoriality freed from everything mechanical is, it overlooks a crucial part of Twombly's work: his photographs.

II

When the photographs of Cy Twombly were exhibited for the first time in 1993 in the New York gallery of Matthew Marks, this may well have been no small surprise for the connoisseurs of the artist's work.⁷ Half ironically, yet also half consternated, Laszlo Glozer, for example, asks: "Is this allowed?"⁸ Whether allowed or not, such an extension of Twombly's artistic spectrum can indeed surprise. Yet, the criterion, otherwise so conspicuous in his work, of direct, unmediated inscribing of a characteristic style bound to the artist's hand becomes problematic with the choice of

⁵ Barthes 1991, 158.

⁶ Jeff Wall: Beobachtungen, ausgehend von einem Gespräch mit Achim Hochdörfer. In: Vienna 2009, 132. [Trans. here from German].

⁷ See the earliest corresponding catalog: CT Ph 1993. For a systematic overview of the various graphic work groups, see mainly Altenburg 2009 and Schloss Gottorf 2011.

⁸ Glozer 2008, 8.

photography as an artistic medium. It can in any case only be imagined with some difficulty in what way this “clumsy” ductus, which Barthes had identified as an essential feature of Twombly’s style,⁹ is supposed to unfold under conditions of technical pictoriality. That hand, which already possesses the center of the shot in the 1944 self-portrait, will be able in the process of photographing to be scarcely more than one equal actor among many others.

The gesture of the painter and drawer that Twombly in this early portrait performs, as though rehearsing on a stage, and that becomes expected in the years of the emergence of his work that follow, is pushed to the side by the gesture of the photographer. It is—here, Vilém Flusser vigorously reminds us—a gesture entirely with its own laws, which lets the freedom of pictorial representation become experienceable as a “programmed freedom” through apparatus-based orders.¹⁰ “The practice of the photographer is tied to a program. The photographer can only act within the program of the apparatus, even if under the belief of acting against this program.”¹¹ Between artist and picture, an apparatus steps in and physical as well as chemical conditions intervene that inscribe into the process of the picture’s emergence their own respective logics. To produce a photographic exposure always hence means, whether willfully or not, to find oneself at a certain distance to the material of the picture. For an artist, meanwhile, for whom as Barthes aptly observes, the contention with his material—“these few pencil strokes, this graph paper, this patch of pink, that brown smudge”¹²—is a crucial aesthetic principle, such a distance from the picture signifies a challenge of a quite particular kind.

On the basis of the photographic process, it becomes possible to rethink proximity and distance to the image. And the photographic process makes it necessary to set up in a quite particular way the interrelation of free play and rule-based order in the production of an image. Precisely on this account, so my thesis, did the painter and drawer Cy Twombly photograph. In fact, as has been emphasized rightly by Laszlo Glozer, all his photographs occupy something more than the status of a “domestic side activity.”¹³ Compared with the numerous paintings and drawings, they are an alternative possibility, a position to correlate

9 Barthes 1991, 163–166, quotation from 157.

10 Vilém Flusser: *Für eine Philosophie der Fotografie*. Berlin 1983, 33.

11 Ibid., 36.

12 Barthes 1991, 178.

13 Glozer 2008, 8.

within that aesthetic matrix, a position that Barthes had opened up by means of the opposition of “game” and “play” and extended with a view to Twombly’s artistic gestus around processual “playing.”¹⁴ Here what is vital is that, with the photographs, Twombly did not simply expand the repertoire of his artistic gestures around pictorial techniques dependent on an apparatus-based order. It also touches further onto thinking about the premises, the rules of Twombly’s visual aesthetic on the whole.

If one wishes to reflect on Cy Twombly’s photographic work, one must contend with methodological difficulties. First of all, his photographs became known to the public relatively late. The presentation of these images, as Glozier opined, may have been “unexpected”¹⁵ to an interested public. Yet it is not a matter of a “late stroke of genius”¹⁶ with which the then 65-year-old artist complements via another medium the triad of paintings, drawings and sculptures known to that point in his work. The putatively quite “new œuvre,”¹⁷ of which Glozier spoke on the occasion of the first concise presentation of the photographs in the form of a selected catalog, has roots that go back to Twombly’s time as an art student at Black Mountain College in Asheville (North Carolina), i.e., to the beginning of the 1950’s.¹⁸ Viewing the images that arose at this time (ills. 2–3) reveals a keen interest in questions of composition. These are etudes of formal pictorial arrangement that announce a fine sense for determining cropping and perspective. The subjects chosen—this becomes evident in viewing these photographs—do not require a far-reaching semantic justification to be able to be of interest for the photographer Twombly.

Since this time, Twombly has worked on photographic series. If it can be said quite generally for the medium of photography that his images appear only in exceptional cases as individual works,¹⁹ this is also valid

¹⁴ Barthes 1991, 172.

¹⁵ Glozier 2008, 7.—Cf. on this also Greub 2011.

¹⁶ Glozier 2008, 7.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ On this, and also not least on the photographic collaboration with Robert Rauschenberg, see in more detail Nicholas Cullinan: Camera obscura. Cy Twombly’s photographic subjects and objects. In: Éric Mézil (ed.): *Le temps retrouvé. Cy Twombly photographie & artistes invités*, 2 Vols., Vol. 1. Paris 2011, 47.

¹⁹ Blake Stimson: A Photograph Is Never Alone. In: Robin Kelsey / Blake Stimson (ed.): *The Meaning of Photography*. New Haven / London 2008, 105–117; Steffen Siegel: Silberblick. Überlegungen zum Bild im Dual. In: Ibid.: *Belichtungen. Zur fotografischen Gegenwart*. Munich 2014, 59–74.



2 Cy Twombly: *Table, Chair and Cloth*, Tetuan, 1951, 43.1 × 27.9 cm, dry-print on cardboard



3 Cy Twombly: *Still Life*, Black Mountain College, 1951, 43.1 × 27.9 cm, dry-print on cardboard



4 Cy Twombly: *Untitled, Gaeta*, 2008, 43.1 × 27.9 cm, dry-print on cardboard

in regard to Twombly's photographic methods. The emerging images repeatedly play around certain motific emphases. Flowers are among these (ill. 4), as well as landscapes (ill. 5), everyday objects, views into interiors (ill. 6), atelier scenes and finally also details from paintings (ill. 7), of his own as well as of others. However, in regard to the continuity in which all these photographic series emerged, only a relatively inadequate assessment can be given on the basis of the currently available information, while the various selected catalogs that are available put the essential emphasis, with few exceptions, on the artist's late years. No small part may have been played in this by the artist himself having become active editorially in setting up these catalogs. Thus, what can be spoken of in today's terms vis-à-vis Twombly the photographer has passed through several key filters.

Questions about continuity and development, ruptures and new approaches can thus only be situated in a limited sense in reference to this photographic oeuvre. In the comparatively late publication-based appraisal, it is only with some difficulty that one can counter the emerging tendency towards summarizing a photographic production that unfolded across decades into a single, overarching perspective. There are reasons to regret this, for in fact the quite fleeting pictorial comparisons that pose works from the student era next to those from the late work, plainly show considerable differences in the conception of the photographic image. The strict formalism, for example, with which Twombly stages the Temple of Concordia in Agrigento in 1951 (ill. 8) has little in common with the seemingly careless fugacity of a blossom still life from the year 2008 (ill. 4). However, it is the difference opened up between these examples that is interesting, especially that step that had to be undergone to move between them.

If one views Twombly's photographic work from a perspective presupposing the aesthetic of his paintings and drawings, then the choice of this technological medium must be astonishing, indeed disconcerting. It was after all Twombly who was continually anxious in his debate with painting and drawing to overcome a paradigm of visual representation that makes the image subordinate to mimetic concepts and intentions.²⁰ Precisely the principle of the inscription of canvases, in ever new instantiations, reminds us that a visibility organized within the picture can overcome this frame of a representational order. With the medium of photography—so at least it must seem—it is precisely this aesthetic tendency pursued by

²⁰ Dobbe 1999.



5 Cy Twombly: *Bay of Gaeta, Gaeta*, 2005, 43.1 × 27.9 cm,
dry-print on cardboard



6 Cy Twombly: *Interior, Rome*, 1980, 43.1 × 27.9 cm, dry-print on cardboard



7 Cy Twombly: *Painting Detail*, Gaeta, 2000, 43.1 × 27.9 cm, dry-print on cardboard



8 Cy Twombly: *Temple*, Agrigent, 1951, 43.1 × 27.9 cm, dry-print on cardboard

Twombly that is inevitably abandoned. That measure of abstraction developed in the corpus of the paintings and drawings is distanced²¹ once again in the photographs. As unprepossessing and unagitated in their details as the subjects may be that are disclosed here, they all offer significantly more to the eye attuned to recognition than this could be validly made for Twombly's remaining work. Formulated differently: Twombly's photographic gesture is not an avant-garde one. The interest that stands out in his photographs conforms clearly to the visible exterior world and its interpretation under the conditions of technological pictoriality. Similarly clearly, however, the prominent majority of the pictures arising in this process can be understood as an argument against that cliché of the photographic that has long been criticized for good reasons as a "white mythology of photography."²² Twombly's work on the photographic image amounts to an expulsion of the idea of objective pictoriality. Against the use that reality makes of the photographic image, Twombly sets strategies of image processing aimed at the inscription of dual signatures: on the one hand, that of the apparatus-based formative conditions and, on the other, that of the artist subject acting behind this formation.

III

The unfinished and the unclean, the unskillful and the unthought are nothing other than the expression become visible of an aesthetic program (ill. 9). Twombly's photographs are distinguished by their blurriness²³ with such great regularity that one willingly concedes Glozer's observation that these images were created with a routinely "trembling hand on the shutter release."²⁴ Part of this practice is the overexposure with which Twombly worked. A third feature is, finally, the photographer's excessive nearness to his objects. The arising close-up cuts off the motifs from all

21 In German "*entfernt*", tr. note: as in the title of the essay, "*Entfernung*" implies here a double meaning as both a distance from as well as removal of abstraction.

22 Michael Charlesworth: Fox Talbot and the 'White Mythology' of Photography. In: *Word & Image* 11 (1995), 207–215.

23 Twombly forms part of a line in a history of blurriness that has significance as a whole for the modern aesthetic. See at length Wolfgang Ullrich: *Die Geschichte der Unschärfe*. Berlin 2002. With particular reference to Twombly: Peter Geimer: Cy Twombly, Maler / Cy Twombly, Fotograf. In: Vienna 2009, 116–127.

24 Glozer 2008, 24.



9 Cy Twombly: *Nuts*, Gaeta, 2004, 43.1 × 27.9 cm, dry-print on cardboard

their contexts and contributes to an insistent confounding of the image contents. With a fine turn of phrase, Hubertus von Amelunxen has likened the photographic pictoriality resulting from such factors with a visual impression—"as if we were squinting at the world or had just woken up."²⁵ Of all things it is the word-painter Twombly who is interested in a "lack of legibility"²⁶ in his photographs.

And yet precisely in this, a rapprochement of the different work groups can be observed. With a view to the paintings, Barthes had likened the productive process pursued by Twombly to an act of throwing: "the materials seem thrown across the canvas."²⁷ A mixture of decisiveness and indecision is delineated, which binds the planned and directed with the accidental and surprising: "by throwing, I know what I am doing, but I do not know what I am producing."²⁸ It is this paradoxical aleatorics that Twombly applies to the production of his photographs. In this, a crucial factor is the configuration of the apparatus. The greatest part of his photographs was shot with an instant-picture camera. On the one hand, such a camera allows spontaneous exposures committed entirely to the moment, without requiring a complex knowledge of rules in doing so. Amelunxen even went so far as to describe this comparatively simple mechanism as an extension of the artist's body: "When Twombly takes pictures, the camera is an extension of himself."²⁹ On the other, such a camera can achieve at most mediocre results, which will in no way measure up to the high quality that can be obtained through exacting camera technique. A third and final point would be that that any pictures producible in this manner are small-format unica.

Yet the photography that Twombly has "thrown" with the instant-picture camera is not what we ultimately can observe in the catalog or framed image. A transformation process comes into play in-between, which "striped" the Polaroid picture "of their slick gloss"³⁰ and by means of a photocopy-technique translates the chromaticity of the original unicum into an image of far more matte, dull, muted impression. It is this that is finally produced in a small edition.³¹ It cannot be said with

²⁵ Amelunxen 2011, 175.

²⁶ Fitschen 2011, 15.

²⁷ Barthes 1991, 181.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Amelunxen 2011, 170.

³⁰ Glozer 2008, 9.

³¹ See the remarks of William Katz in CT Ph 1993.

certainly whether Twombly knew of the predecessors with whom he was affiliated in the photographic aesthetic that he evolved. Yet all the same, the early self-portrait of 1944 (cf. ill. 1) suggests that Twombly was not only sensitive to the visual art history that preceded him, but was also aware of appropriating its creative principles in nearly perfect mimicry. In any case, with a view to his photographs that emerged later, it is striking how strongly these profit from the pictorial aesthetic of the turn of the century and how great the proximity is of the results obtained in this manner, despite the span of a whole century.³²

Whatever the differences in the details, the pictorialists of the late 19th and early 20th century cultivated that so-called “painterly effect”³³ in their photographs that repressed the inevitably mechanical quality of this form of pictoriality in favor a hand-worked gesture. The ideology of an image production that can completely forgo the hand of an artist—what William Henry Fox Talbot already described as an autopoietic self-inscribing of nature³⁴—turns here into its opposite: Photography is a visual medium directed at nothing so much as the conceiving and guiding artist’s will and formative artist’s hand. In place of the idea of an objective pictoriality that is entirely obliged to a reality preset for the picture, here “manifesto[s] for sensitive vision”³⁵ enter the scene that in contrast shift into the center of interest precisely the producing and receiving subject. The gesture of blurriness, overlighting and close-up inscribed into the image becomes in the process the visible sign of a pictorial aesthetics bound to the artist subject.

32 For an overview see Mike Weaver: *The Photographic Art. Pictorial Traditions in Britain and America*. London 1986. Also, recently, the collection of sources concentrating on the German-language space by Bernd Stiegler / Felix Thürlemann (ed.): *Das subjektive Bild. Texte zur Kunstphotographie um 1900*. Munich 2012.

33 See H[enry] P[each] Robinson: *Der malerische Effect in der Photographie als Anleitung zur Composition und Behandlung des Lichtes in den Photographien* [London 1869], translated freely from the English by C. Schiendl. Halle an der Saale 1886.

34 Charlesworth 1995, op. cit.; Steve Edwards: The Dialectics of Skill in Talbot’s Dream World. In: *History of Photography* 26 (2002), 113–118; Kelley Wilder: William Henry Fox Talbot und ‘the Picture which makes ITSELF’. In: Friedrich Weltzien (ed.): *von selbst. Autopoietische Verfahren in der Ästhetik des 19. Jahrhunderts*. Berlin 2006, 189–197.

35 Glozer 2008, 10.

Both expressions of a photographic aesthetics, i.e., both the paradigm of objectivity and that of subjectivity, are exaggerating stylizations. Their value lies in that heuristic function with which they prod reflection on photography. Twombly's aestheticized appropriation of this medium is of interest not only for the documentary possibilities or the options for steering of a gaze through a photographic supplement.³⁶ His use of this medium is subject to—in a twofold manner—the idea of a distancing of abstraction. Producing a photograph signifies recognizing the representational order of mimetic pictoriality. If one thus views Twombly's photographic oeuvre from this perspective, given by his paintings as well as drawings, then the renunciation of abstraction occurring here must be immediately striking. Indeed, Laszlo Glozer's curious question is ultimately indebted to this order of observation: "Is this allowed?" If, however, one views the photographs ultimately under the aesthetic order that they provide, what is striking to the contrary is the high measure to which they renounce a mimetic reconstruction that is at the same time their own. The distancing of abstraction that one could speak of here implies then a distance that is owing not only to the photographic apparatus, but above all to a preconceived aesthetic calculation.

It was Vilém Flusser who characterized the possibility of a photographic gestus as a dialectics of autonomy and heteronomy, subject and material: "In photography, the apparatus does what the photographer wants, and the photographer must want what the apparatus can."³⁷ Quite literally, Twombly's work with the photographic image can be understood as a contemplating of the material. In this way, one of his simplest, most casual shots is, nevertheless, also one of his most complex, most calculated (ill. 10). Captured in the quadrangle of the Polaroid photograph are seven paintbrushes, one of which, completely at the right edge, can only in small part be seen. The painter has paused in his work and inspected, with the instant camera in hand, the instruments of his artistic creating (cf. p. 364, ill. 9). They lift up like threateningly raised lances in front of a grey sky. They enter like the hand puppets on the stage of a children's theatre, and they look down at us haughtily with their little heads. They allow us to think how an image always shows only as much as we, the observers, are ready to see in it; and how much we understand to perceive

36 Constantin Brancusi had made extensive use of this. In this regard, see the excellent catalog by Quentin Bajac / Clément Chéroux / Philippe-Alain Michaud (ed.): *Brancusi, film, photographie, images sans fin*. Paris 2011.

37 Flusser 1983, op. cit., 33.



10 Cy Twombly: *Brushes*, Gaeta, 2009, 43.1 × 27.9 cm, dry-print on cardboard

from the distancing of abstraction. And they provide quite casually, in a medium other than that otherwise familiar from Twombly, answers to those three questions that Roland Barthes already posed with some reason in 1979: “Who is Cy Twombly [...]? What is it he does? And what are we to call what he does?”

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1-10 © Fondazione Nicola Del Roscio. Courtesy Archives Fondazione Nicola Del Roscio.

II. ANTIQUITY AS INSPIRATION

*I had already read Catullus, and the image came
that is one of the really beautiful lines. ...
'Say goodbye, Catullus, to the shores of Asia Minor.'
It's so beautiful. Just all that part of the world I love.*

Cy Twombly, 2000

PETR CHARVÁT

CY TWOMBLY, SUMER, AND THE SUMERIANS

The US born artist Cy Twombly (1928–2011), who resided permanently in Italy from 1957, frequently chose themes from the past ages of human civilization, from ancient Egypt up to Greek and Roman antiquity.¹ This short note focuses on Twombly's creations inspired by one of the earliest literate civilizations of mankind, that of Sumer and the Sumerians (c. 3500–2500 BC).

Two sculptures have been brought up in this connection. Of these, first and foremost is Twombly's *Thicket*—with the additional title of *Thicket of Ur*²—of 1990, re-worked in 1999 (ill. 1).³ Katharina Schmidt notices that this idea occupied Twombly for a considerable time;⁴ he worked out and re-worked several versions in 1981, 1990, 1991, and 1992, and did so in various places.⁵ The *Thicket of Ur* is a strictly symmetrical composition, with the central carrier construction assuming the form of a high and slender letter A, with four short protrusions issuing out of it

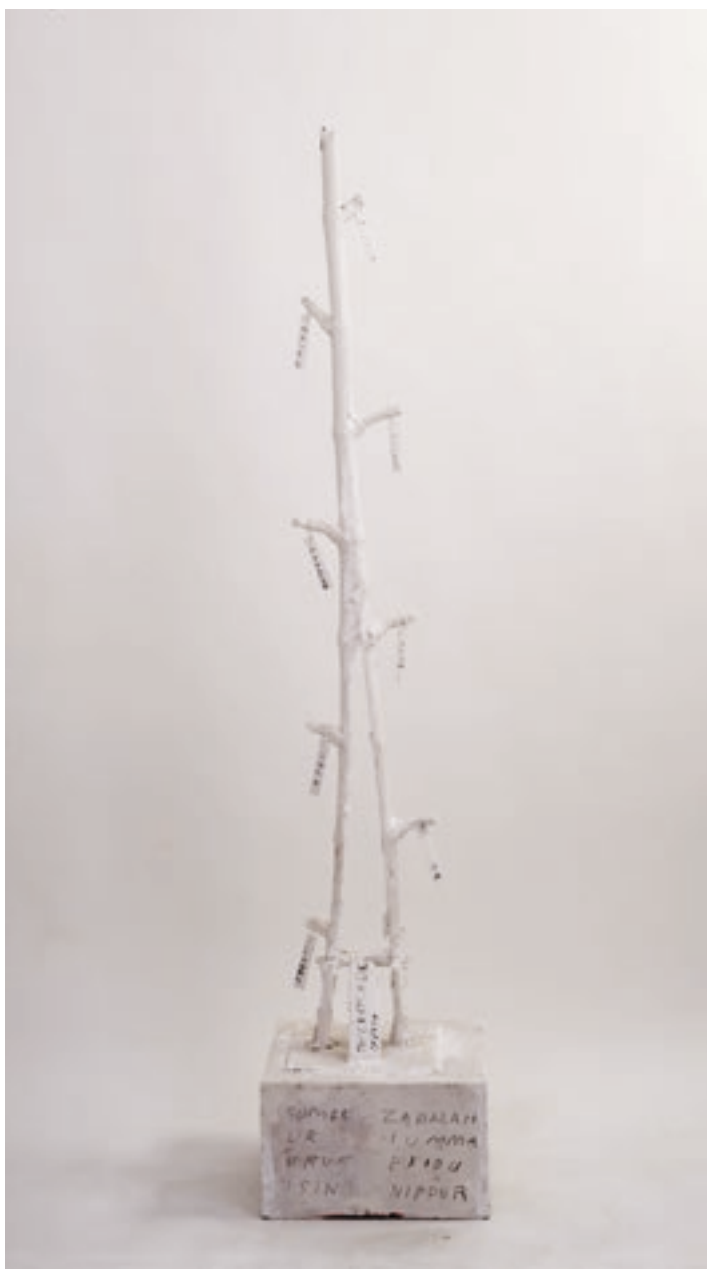
1 Craig G. Staff: A Poetics of Becoming: The Mythography of Cy Twombly. In: Isabelle Loring Wallace / Jennie Hirsh (ed.): *Contemporary Art and Classical Myth*. Farnham / Burlington, VT 2011, 43–55.

2 Title of the sculpture at the Kunstmuseum Basel: *Thicket (Thicket of Ur)*. Henceforth this title will be used for this version for the better distinction of the two works.

3 NDR S I 109, pp. 236–237 (on p. 237 photograph of the sculpture in 1990); Basel 2000, 100.—The artist finished it at Gaeta, and in 2001 it was subsequently purchased for the Kunstmuseum Basel by the *Arnold Rüdlinger-Fonds der Freiwilligen Akademischen Gesellschaft*. It now bears the inventory number G 2001.7.

4 Basel 2000, 102.

5 There are four sculptures by Cy Twombly with this title, cf. NDR S I 61 (from 1981, Formia–Rome), the version at the Kunstmuseum Basel (109 [1990/1999], Gaeta), 110 (1991, Gaeta) and 126 (1992, Jupiter Island).



1 Cy Twombly: *Thicket (Thicket of Ur)*, Gaeta, 1990/1999, bamboo, metal, wood, wire, wooden tags, white paint, gypsum, 188.5 × 38 × 36 cm, Basel, Kunstmuseum Basel, inv. G 2001.7



2 Cy Twombly: *Thicket*, Gaeta, 1991, wood, white cement, wire, twine, paper, wooden tags, white paint, 260 × 41 × 41 cm, Potomac, Glenstone

on each side, left and right.⁶ The transverse bar of the letter A bears the title of the work: *Thicket of Ur*. One of the earlier versions of this work, done at Formia and Rome in 1981, boasted a pair of scammony flowers at its very top on the side branches ('Kalla-Blüten')⁷. Inscribed tags, hanging from these protrusions, give names of Sumerian cities: 'NIPPUR', 'IUMMA', 'ISIN', and 'UR' from top to bottom on one side, and 'ERIDU', 'ZABALAM', 'URUK', and 'SUMER' on the other. These toponyms are repeated on the sculpture's pedestal: 'SUMER / UR / URUK / ISIN // ZABALAN / IUMMA / ERIDU / NIPPUR'.⁸

The other work, entitled *Thicket* (and inscribed by Twombly: 'THICKETS of AKKAD + SUMMER'), is a Gaeta work of 1991, and was retrieved from the artist's collection at Rome⁹ (ill. 2). This composition somewhat resembles a bush or a low tree with a high trunk and a branching crown; it is supposed to show a laurel tree.¹⁰ The white color with which the sculpture is covered refers purportedly to the cycle of birth and death, comprising the symbolism of Apollo's plant.¹¹ The title of the work is inscribed on the tree trunk while labels with names of Sumerian urban communities again hang from its branches. These enumerate, from top to bottom, 'NIPPUR', 'ISIN', 'ZABALAM', 'UMMA', 'UR', 'ERIDU', 'TELL AL UBAI', and 'URUK'.

Both sculptures have been characterized as 'Baumplastiken' ('tree sculptures'), with the *Thicket of Ur* being compared to a simple form of a ladder.¹²

The two *Thicket* sculptures are supposed to reflect inspiration by an ancient work of art, found in one of the richly equipped burials (PG 1237) of a cemetery at the Sumerian city of Ur, and commonly called *Ram caught in a thicket* (ills. 3.1–2). This view has been put forward especially in view

6 Let us listen to Cy Twombly himself: '[...] the shape of the A has a phallic aggression—more like a rocket', Sylvester 2001, 178.

7 Basel 2000, no. 28 of the catalog, and p. 104.

8 NDR S I 109 and 110; Basel 2000, 104.

9 NDR S I 110, pp. 238–239; Basel 2000, 100, 106.

10 Katharina Schmidt in Basel 2000, 106.

11 Ibid., 106.—'White paint is my marble', says Twombly himself, Basel 2000, 49. And elsewhere: 'Whiteness can be the classic state of the intellect, or a neo-romantic area of remembrance—or as the symbolic whiteness of Mallarmé.', New York 1994, 27.

12 Basel 2000, 104.



3.1 *Ram caught in a thicket* or *The Ram in the thicket*, Ur, PG 1237, before 2563 B.C., London, The British Museum



3.2 *Ram caught in a thicket*, Ur, field photo



4 Ur, plan of the mass burial PG 1237

of the pair of scammony flowers crowning the original 1981 version,¹³ assumed to have been inspired by the animals' horns and ears.¹⁴ The mass burial PG 1237, baptized by Woolley 'The Great Death Pit', contained 74 human bodies and a large amount of treasure of which the 'Ram' represents but one sample (ill. 4). The sculpture, of which two examples are

¹³ NDR S I 61.

¹⁴ Katharina Schmidt in Basel 2000, 102, 104, and *ibid.*, ill. 29.

known, was composed of various materials of precious character (gold, silver, lapis lazuli), stuck in a bitumen coating that covers a core of wood. It represents a goat leaning with its forehooves on a tree. Originally there may have been two of the horned quadrupeds arranged symmetrically around the tree, which constituted a central line and axis for the whole composition. The sculpture dates from the time before 2563 BC, most probably from somewhere in the 27th to early 26th pre-Christian century.

Present-day scholars see in the whole group an emblem evoking nature's fertility and fecundity, linking up with the idea that the personages buried in the 'Royal graves' represent the earthly *avatars* of the dying and resurrecting god Dumuzi, one of the fertility deities of ancient Mesopotamia, and Inanna, the incarnation of the female procreative force.¹⁵ The entire composition may herald the later 'sacred tree' motif in Mesopotamian art.¹⁶

A note on the sculpture's name: No link to the world of the Old Testament¹⁷ can be proposed, and the sculpture has nothing whatever to do with the Biblical realities, being much older than the Scriptures. The name under which it became known must have been invented by Leonard Woolley (1880–1960), who was endowed with an extraordinary gift for popularizing archaeology and archaeological work. Quite often, he deliberately described his discoveries in terms borrowed from Biblical texts, in order to make them more accessible to, and especially more apt to slip into the memory of, the general public. A masterpiece of this kind of persuasion is the label 'Ur of the Chaldees' which Woolley constantly employed when referring to his work at Tell al-Muqayyar in southern Iraq. Much as with the 'Ram caught in a thicket', which isn't a ram, Tell

15 Petr Charvát: *On people, signs and states—Spotlights on Sumerian Society, c. 3500–2500 B.C.* Prague 1997; Petr Charvát: *Mesopotamia Before History.* London / New York 2002; Susan Pollock: *The Royal Cemetery of Ur: Ritual, Tradition, and the Creation of Subjects.* In: Marlies Heinz / Marian H. Feldman (ed.): *Representations of Political Power—Case Histories from Times of Change and Dissolving Order in the Ancient Near East.* Winona Lake, Indiana 2007, 89–110; Susan Pollock: *Death of a Household.* In: Nicola Laneri (ed.): *Performing Death—Social Analyses of Funerary Traditions in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean* (Oriental Institute Seminars No. 3). Chicago, IL 2007/2008, 209–221; Richard L. Zettler / Lee Horne (ed.): *Treasures From the Royal Tombs of Ur.* Philadelphia 1998.

16 Mariana Giovino: *The Assyrian Sacred Tree* (Orbis Biblicus Et Orientalis 230). Fribourg / Göttingen 2007.

17 The sacrifice of Abraham (Gen. 22, 1–19).



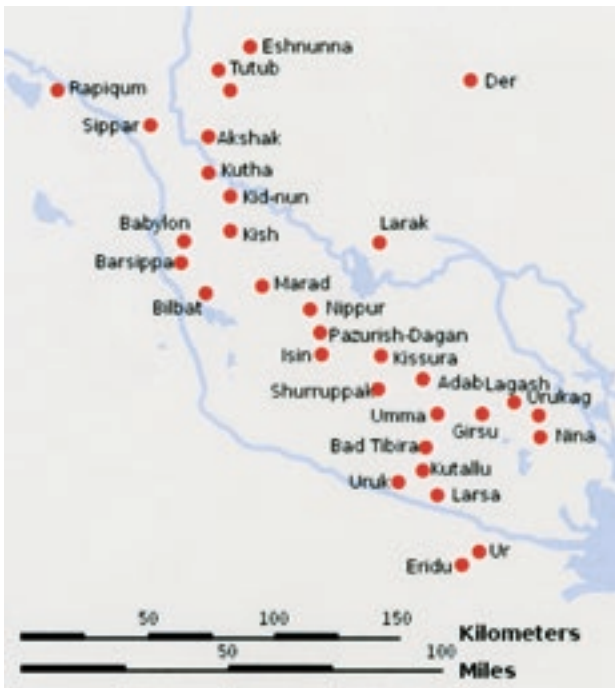
5 Woolley's telegram sent to the Philadelphia University Museum, and written in Latin for the safety of the information conveyed

al-Muqayyar is emphatically not Ur of the Chaldees from which Abraham, the biblical hero, hailed. This denomination, chosen again on purpose by Woolley, was designed to help him win popular support and fame, and, of course, to facilitate his negotiations with possible sponsors of his dig.¹⁸ Leonard Woolley himself displayed a great deal of self-esteem, and of ambition to surpass his archaeological colleagues in the abundance and richness of results from his excavations, combined with a jealous

¹⁸ The success of Woolley as mythmaker can be estimated from the fact that even Saddam Hussein, the late Iraqi dictator, was persuaded by this idea to re-create the house where Abraham was born at Ur. According to the local witnesses, 'in the early 1990s, Pope John Paul II wanted to visit the holy house. Saddam Hussein ordered that the building be rebuilt upon the original foundation. Once the project was completed, Saddam refused to ensure the Pope's safety, so the Pope never made the journey' (<http://suite101.com/article/city-of-ur-abrahams-home-a30444>, cited September 18, 2012).

insistence on his own merit (ill. 5).¹⁹ This aspect of Woolley's personality has been illuminated by his student and successor, Max Edgar Lucien Mallowan, of course in a book printed long after his tutor's death.²⁰

The ancient meaning of the 'Ram caught in a thicket' did naturally lean on the uniting of symbols of the plant and animal world in order to evoke the procreative forces of nature, and to secure their eternal character by placing the sculpture in a tomb of a personage assumed to represent a dying and resurrecting deity. The twentieth-century artist, taking the work at its 'face value' as a composition, perceived as its major constituting principle the central axis, which embodies a vertical 'hub' of the whole group, and reduced the flanking creature(s) to minor lateral additions.



6 Map of the cities of Sumer

¹⁹ The text of the telegram that he sent to the University Museum at Philadelphia upon discovery of a particularly rich interment was composed in Latin, to prevent the unauthorized propagation of knowledge of his discovery.

²⁰ Max Mallowan: *Mallowan's Memoirs*. New York / London 1977.

The interesting thing, however, is represented by the written labels completing the works in question, which give clear references to realities of the ancient Sumerian world. The *Thicket of Ur* (in the version of the Kunstmuseum Basel) displays on the sculpture's pedestal, on the left side from top to bottom, the names of the cities of 'SUMER', 'UR', 'URUK', and 'ISIN'. On the other side, 'ZABALAN' (*recte* Zabalam—as on the inscribed tag—or Zabala), 'TUMMA' (*recte* Umma), 'ERIDU', and 'NIPPUR' constitute a mirror-like counterpart of the first group in the same order.²¹ I am at a loss to discern any order in this enumeration. Sumer represents the name of the whole land (ill. 6). Ur, Uruk, and Isin lie along a curved line along the western periphery of the area. The line linking Zabalam (18 km north of Umma), Umma, and Eridu does nonetheless intersect this curved contour line in a manner like the letter X.

The city of Ur may perhaps have assumed the topmost position because the 'Ram caught in a thicket' was found there.

As to the misspellings of the individual names, we can guess their significance only with difficulty. The 'TUMMA' of *Thicket of Ur* is likely to have been recognized as error by Twombly himself, because *Thicket* (the name that shall henceforth be used here for the second version of the sculpture with written labels) has the correct 'Umma'. 'ZABALAN' for Zabalam presents a different matter, but what it may have hinted at for the sculptor we cannot really say.²²

It may be interesting to speculate on the irregularities of Twombly's rendering of the city names. Zabalan and Zabalam are easy to confuse, especially for native speakers of English used to disregarding the unstressed word ends and the not very distinct nasals in these positions. Even more interesting is the listing of Umma as 'Iumma'. Here we may

21 Recently on cities of Mesopotamia see Roger J. Matthews: *Cities, Seals and Writing: Archaic seal impressions from Jemdet Nasr and Ur* (Materialien zu den frühen Schrifterzeugnissen des Vorderen Orients = MSVO, vol. 2). Berlin 1993; Josef Bauer / Robert Englund / Manfred Krebern timer: *Mesopotamien. Späturuk-Zeit und Frühdynastische Zeit* (OBO 160/1). Fribourg / Göttingen 1998; Aage Westenholz / Walther Sallaberger: *Mesopotamien. Akkade-Zeit und Ur III-Zeit* (OBO 160/3). Fribourg / Göttingen 1999; Gwendolyn Leick: *Mesopotamia—The Invention of the City*. London etc. 2002.

22 In this connection let us hear what the artist himself has to say: 'It's called *Fifty Days in Iliam*; I spelt it I-L-I-A-M, which is not correct. It's U-M. But I wanted that, I wanted the A for Achilles; I always think of A as Achilles; I wanted the A there and no one ever wrote and told me that I had misspelt Ilium.', Sylvester 2001, 177.

assume that Twombly first met this toponym in an audible, spoken form, either hearing it from someone else or trying to devise the pronunciation himself, e.g. on the model of the U.S. city of Yuma, Arizona. Of course, we shall never know the truth.

The other item, *Thicket* (from 1991), presents a higher degree of interest. Above the bifurcation into two main branches of the configuration, the lowermost positions on the longer branch are occupied by 'URUK', and 'TELL AL UBAI' (*recte* Tell al-Ubaid), accompanied, on the top of the shorter branch, by 'ERIDU'. The site of Uruk does actually constitute Mesopotamia's earliest city and the root and origin of the entire civilization of the Land between Two Rivers.²³ Eridu, on the other hand, never hosted a secular administrative center, but the Sumerians conceived of it as the residence of Enki, god of water and knowledge, and the seat of all wisdom of their civilization. The middle *échelon* of the longer branch carries the names 'UR', 'UMMA', and 'ZABALAM'. These cities do not have much in common, and here the principle of random choice may have been operative. Ur is to be found in the extreme south of Sumer while the other two lie in the land's middle part. Finally, 'ISIN' and 'NIPPUR' sit on the highest point of the longer branch. The city of Isin does not occupy any very visible position in Sumerian history, but Nippur, seat of the atmospheric god Enlil, stood for a centre of Sumerian learning and the literary arts, at least from about 2000 BC onward.

Here the artist may have brought into play his somewhat deeper knowledge of the history of the Sumerian world, and his insight into the historical relationships among Sumerian cities. We can also definitely confirm that he was working with a viable idea of Sumerian geography:

23 Cf. the exhibition catalog: *Uruk—5000 Jahre Megacity* (Pergamon Museum Berlin 2013 / Reiss-Engelhorn Museen 2013/14). Petersberg 2013.—On the other hand, the site of Tell al-Ubaid did not make a great impact on Sumerian history but has yielded one of the earliest sets of art monuments of Sumerian architecture and sculpture that became known to twentieth-century scholars. Incidentally, we may note that Twombly must have gotten this toponym from a printed text, as this transcription is peculiar to English-language texts, French and German using more frequently the form 'el-Obeid' or 'Tell el-Obeid'. On the site see a recent summary of facts in Peter Pfälzner / Jochen Schmid: Das Tempeloval von Urkeš. Betrachtungen zur Typologie und Entwicklungsgeschichte der mesopotamischen Ziqqurat im 3. Jahrtausend v. Chr. In: *Zeitschrift für Orient-Archäologie* 1/2008, 396–433.

by and large, the three groups of municipal communities actually follow one another from the south to the north.

No possible temporal dimension of Twombly's arrangement of the municipal cluster is visible. Both 'ends' of the time range of Sumerian history—the period after 3500 BC (Uruk), and the age after c. 2000 BC when Sumerian died out as a living language (Isin)—are present among the *Thicket of Ur* and *Thicket* tags.

The only comparable evidence for a collective entity comprising Cy Twombly's city labels are early sealings belonging to the 'City league', a (con)federation of municipal communities of Sumer active between c. 3200 and 2700 BC.²⁴ These include the *Thicket of Ur* and *Thicket* tags, with the addition of three sites not mentioned as members of the 'City league': Zabalam, Isin, and Tell al-Ubaid whose ancient name is not known. It was Tell al-Ubaid that yielded the art monuments mentioned above; Zabalam and Isin 'made history' in the third and beginning of second pre-Christian millennium, as Cy Twombly could easily learn from any manual on ancient Mesopotamia.

Where did Cy Twombly get his knowledge of ancient Sumerian cities? This is a difficult question. We have seen that he probably obtained the information for *Thicket of Ur* in conversation. Later on, he probably learned more things needed for *Thicket* by reading. As to who told him about early Sumer, we remain entirely in the dark, and an answer to this question seems to be beyond the bounds of the possible. As for his reading, we may see the most likely candidates in the books by Samuel Noah Kramer, a noted Assyriologist or rather Sumerologist of the University of Pennsylvania at Philadelphia, whose books on ancient Sumer gained much popularity during the 60s and 70s of the twentieth century.²⁵ Twombly could have acquired them via the DEA, an international bookshop enterprise of Rome, Italy, established as early as 1946 and active until today.²⁶

24 Cf. Matthews 1993, op. cit., and more recently Walther Sallaberger: Provinz A. In: *Reallexikon der Assyriologie*, vol. 11, Berlin / New York 2006–2008, 34–38.

25 Samuel Noah Kramer: *History Begins at Sumer: Thirty-Nine Firsts in Man's Recorded History*. Philadelphia 1956, 1st edition (25 firsts); 1959, 2nd edition (27 firsts); 1981, 3rd edition; Samuel Noah Kramer: *The Sumerians: Their History, Culture and Character*. Chicago, IL 1963; Samuel Noah Kramer: *Cradle of Civilization*. New York 1967.

26 Cf. <http://www.deastore.com/help/243>, cited September 19, 2012.

But what in the notion of a 'thicket' captured Cy Twombly's attention so firmly that he produced several works of art bearing this title? Was it really the delightful little sculpture excavated from the Ur grave, or may we look for a different source of inspiration? Here I would not entirely exclude the possibility that the sculptor may have seen maps of Sumerian irrigation networks. In the branching-off of their dendritic networks stemming from the main arteries, they do resemble bush- or, at any rate, plant-like configurations, which the artist could have subsumed under the 'thicket' heading (cf. ill. 6).

However the irrigation-channel networks of Sumer do not link the cities of *Thicket of Ur* and *Thicket* in the order conceived by Twombly.

A connection between the municipal communities enumerated in the *Thicket of Ur* and *Thicket* and the plant symbolism of the sculptures may or may not apply. A link between the burgeoning of the cities and procreation forces of nature may be theoretically presumed, but the fact remains that ancient Sumerian artists usually conceptualized the fertility and fecundity of the plant and animal world in a different manner from that of living humans. This, however, is a point most difficult to decide.

Cy Twombly sought inspiration in the Near East at least once more. In 1987, he produced a sculpture entitled *Ctesiphon* in Gaeta.²⁷ For this he obviously found inspiration in the vestiges of an eponymous royal residence of Sassanian Iran (AD 224–651), now some 40 km east of Baghdad, Iraq. But did he work out of books and photographs, or does this sculpture reflect his own personal experience?²⁸ Twombly's ultimate impulse may be seen in the enormous brick-built arch of that edifice, purportedly the largest of its kind in the world.²⁹

In conclusion, I cannot but subscribe to the words already used to characterize the creations of Cy Twombly. In treating ancient mythological, historical, artistic, and literary lore, he did so with liberty characteristic of a great artist. Taking up the themes from the beginnings of human civilization, he welded them into patterns which infused new life into the ancient realities. I sincerely believe that all students of the ancient Near

27 NDR S I 91.

28 In autumn 1979 Twombly traveled to Russia, Central Asia, and Afghanistan, and in summer 1983 he visited Yemen (NDR Z II, 270); cf. also the record by Nicola Del Roscio in this volume.

29 Julian Reade / Chris Scarre (ed.): *The Seventy Wonders of the Ancient world. The Great Monuments and How they were Built*. London 1999, 185–186.

East will appreciate this service that a twentieth-century artist rendered to men and women of yore who had passed away so long ago that their memory might have been lost altogether.

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DIETRICH WILDUNG

WRONG LABEL?

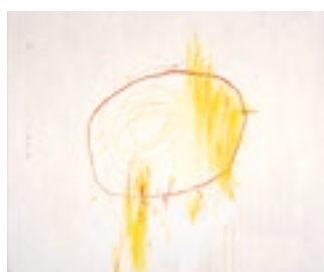
EGYPTOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON *CORONATION OF SESOSTRIS*

Works of art shape the places where they are displayed, and these places can in turn become a part of a work's identity. In this interaction between work and location, the *Sistine Madonna* and the bust of Nefertiti are pieces of Dresden and Berlin. Cy Twombly's "painting in ten parts," which he titled *Coronation of Sesostris* (ills. 1.1–1.10), has given the Punta della Dogana opposite the Piazza San Marco its special place in the artistic topography of Venice, and the work is in turn ennobled by this location in a city so rich in great artworks of the world. François Pinault, by acquiring this work and presenting it on the Canal Grande, paid a unique homage to the most Italian of American artists. That the French collector's choice of this work was influenced also by its title cannot be ruled out. In 1998 he had acquired a granite statue that bears the name of Sesostris III in hieroglyphs; as "L'Affaire Sésostris III" this acquisition occupied the courts for many years in a legal dispute between collector and auctioneer, and due to the person of the buyer it found a lively echo in the French press.¹

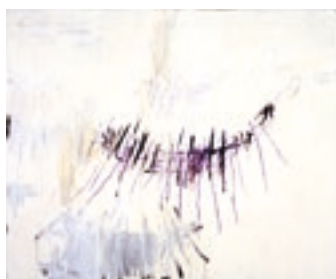
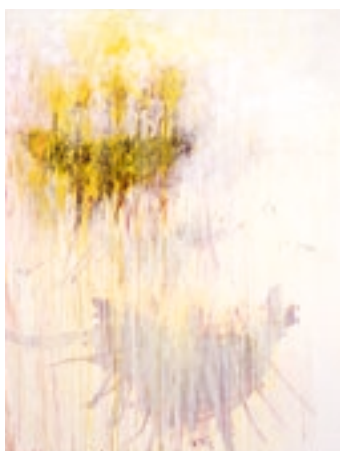
Coronation of Sesostris as the title of a work of contemporary art raises warm hopes in an Egyptologist. The modern and contemporary artists who have addressed ancient Egyptian art are not all too numerous. The art of classicism had refused to accept ancient Egypt—branded 'pre-Greek'—into the canon of classics, which was entirely shaped by Greece and Rome; yet, for "primitivism,"² which at the start of the twentieth

¹ Christiane Desroches-Noblecourt: *Sous le regard des dieux*. Paris 2003, 240–253.

² William Rubin (ed.): *"Primitivism" in 20th-century Art: affinity of the tribal and the modern*. New York, 1984.



1.1-1.10 Cy Twombly: *Coronation of Sesostris*, Lexington, 2000, 10 parts, Parts 1-5 and 6-10, acrylic, wax crayon, lead pencil, in parts paint stick on canvas, various dimensions, Pinault Collection



century discovered non-European art as a source of inspiration, Egypt, as a predecessor of European classicism, was irrelevant. So ancient Egyptian art fell into a vacuum between two great movements in art. It is only in the last few decades that the few artists of modernism who sought an encounter with ancient Egypt have caught the interest of art historians and Egyptologists.³ Paula Modersohn-Becker's self-portraits, with their stylistic closeness to the mummy-portraits of Roman Egypt, have been the subject of an exhibition in Bremen and Cologne.⁴ The Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum in Hanover dedicated an exhibition to Bernhard Hoetger in 2013; in 1915/1920 this artist's dazzling work passed through an intensive phase of reception of Egypt,⁵ the works of which maintain a replica-like closeness to their model and hardly attain independent artistic existence. Pablo Picasso's relation to the art of Egypt is viewed in various ways; iconographically the references to it are limited to a few drawings after Egyptian objects in the Louvre; structurally, however, there is a striking analogy between Picasso's cubism and the principles of ancient Egyptian relief and painting—this is especially strongly marked in the representation of the human face, which blends frontal and profile views to form a two-dimensional three-dimensionality.⁶ Amedeo Modigliani's drawings, too, are influenced by the cubism that had previously been created in Egypt.⁷ It was structural issues, too, that provoked an interest in ancient Egypt among the artists of the Bauhaus. Johannes Itten tried to explain the formal regularities of Egyptian sculpture by geometrical rules.⁸ For Paul Klee a journey to Egypt (1927/28) was what prompted the development of the "cardinal progression", which made use of finely meshed systems of lines, after

3 Heinz Herzer / Sylvia Schoske / Rolf Wedewer / Dietrich Wildung: *Ägyptische und moderne Skulptur. Aufbruch und Dauer*. Munich 1986; Dietrich Wildung / Moritz Wullen (ed.): *Hieroglyphen!* Berlin 2005; Harald Siebenmorgen / Anna zu Stollberg: *Ägypten, die Moderne, die Beurer Kunstschule*. Karlsruhe 2009.

4 Rainer Stamm (ed.): *Paula Modersohn-Becker und die ägyptischen Mumienporträts*. Bremen 2007.

5 Ludwig Roselius d. J.: *Bernhard Hoetger 1874–1949*. Bremen 1974, 62–78.

6 Dietrich Wildung: Anregende Nachbarschaft. Die Sammlung Berggruen und das Ägyptische Museum. In: Peter Klaus Schuster et al. (ed.): *Die Sammlung Berggruen. Picasso und seine Zeit*. Berlin 1996, 287–291.

7 Royal Academy of Arts (ed.): *The unknown Modigliani*. London 1994, 237–300.

8 Ernest W. Uthemann (ed.): *Johannes Itten. Alles in Einem—Alles im Sein*. Saarbrücken 2003, 24 ff.

the model of the ancient Egyptian grid for preliminary drawings.⁹ What fascinated Klee was not the range of motifs in the reliefs and paintings in temples and graves, but the formal structure of this timeless art—and the pictorial hieroglyphics, which also inspired the pictorial scripts of Fritz Koenig.¹⁰

It is formal aspects, too, that linked Alberto Giacometti throughout his life to the art of the Egyptians.¹¹ In countless drawings from illustrations of Egyptian sculptures he attempted to uncover the scaffolding of the figures through dense nets of lines.¹² The rectangular base slabs that were obligatory for his sculptures and the space created by them, as the precondition of a virtual movement, are directly derived from the Egyptian precedent.¹³ When Anselm Kiefer dedicated a monumental pyramid-vision to the writer Ingeborg Bachmann,¹⁴ he bridged the gap between art and the modern literary reception of Egypt, which in works by Rainer Maria Rilke, Franz Werfel, Sigmund Freud, Thomas Mann, Norman Mailer, William Golding, and Naguib Mahfouz documents an engagement with ancient Egypt that puts the artistic reception in the shade.

Exhibitions and publications in the last two decades have created an environment in art scholarship that offers favorable conditions for an attempt to approach Cy Twombly's *Coronation of Sesostri*s. The citing by name of a figure from pharaonic Egypt in the title of the work suggests that the historical facts about Sesostri should first briefly be presented.

Three pharaohs of the 12th Dynasty (1991–1785 BC) bear the name Senwosret (*S-n-Wsr.t*),¹⁵ which appears in the King Lists transmitted in Greek

9 Uta Gerlach-Laxner / Ellen Schwinzer (ed.): *Paul Klee. Reisen in den Süden*. Ostfildern-Ruit 2007, 72–108.

10 Dietrich Clarenbach: *Fritz Koenig, Handzeichnungen*. Munich 2000, 13 (with catalog references).

11 Christian Klemm / Dietrich Wildung: *Giacometti, der Ägypter*. Berlin 2009.

12 His most important models were the monographs of Hedwig Fechheimer: *Plastik der Ägypter*. Berlin 1914 and *Kleinplastik der Ägypter*. Berlin 1921.

13 Markus Bröderlin (ed.): *Alberto Giacometti. Der Ursprung des Raumes*. Wolfsburg 2010.

14 Katharina Schmidt: *Archaische Architekturen 1997* (Pyramiden, Lehmarchitekturen in der Wüste). In: Fondation Beyeler (ed.): *Anselm Kiefer. Die sieben HimmelsPaläste 1973–2001*. Riehen 2001, 65–73.

15 Kurt Sethe: Sesostri. In: *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte und Altertumskunde Ägyptens* I/1 (1900), 3–24.



2 Statues of Sesostri III in position of prayer. Granite. H. 120–130 cm.
From Deir el Bahari. Middle Kingdom, 12th Dynasty, ca. 1850 BC, London,
British Museum

as the name now in current use, Sesostri. Sesostri I¹⁶ (1971–1926 BC) was the builder of the first great temple buildings in Karnak, which quickly rose to become Egypt's central sanctuary. Statues and reliefs from Karnak and from Sesostri's pyramid precinct in Lisht (south of Cairo) demonstrate a flourishing artistic achievement. Sesostri II (1897–1878 BC) makes little impact in the historical record; near his pyramid in Illahun (Fayûm Oasis) lie the ruins of a city in which extensive papyrus archives have been discovered. Sesostri III¹⁷ (1878–1842 BC) appears in numerous portrait statues (ill. 2) and in historical inscriptions as a high-profile political power-player. In this period of the Middle Kingdom, Egypt was enjoying its Golden Age,¹⁸ and Sesostri III led it to the heights of political, economic, and cultural expansion. Hymnic songs praise his power:

16 Claude Obsomer: *Sésostri I^{er}. Étude chronologique et historique du règne*. Bruxelles 1995; Nathalie Favry: *Sésostri I^{er} et le début de la XII^e dynastie*. Paris 2009.

17 Pierre Tallet: *Sésostri III et la fin de la XII^e dynastie*. Paris 2006.

18 Dietrich Wildung: *L'âge d'or de l'Égypte. Le Moyen Empire*. Fribourg 1984.

He who shoots the arrow like Sakhmet,
 to fell thousands of those
 who do not recognize his power.
 The tongue of His Majesty is
 what daunts Nubia.
 His utterances,
 they put the Asians to flight.

Egypt's foreign policy was shaped by the colonization of Nubia up to the Second Nile Cataract (at the present-day national border between Egypt and Sudan). The domestic political effects of Sesostri III as a kindly father of the nation is expressed in a song of praise:

A fresh shadow is he, cool in the summer.
 A warm corner is he, dry in the wintertime.
 A mountain is he, who wards off the storm when the sky rages.¹⁹

The script, language, and art of the Middle Kingdom set the normative standards for two thousand years. However, in ancient Egyptian historiography the names of the Sesostri kings do not stand out from the long line of pharaohs. Only in the Nubian temples at the Second Cataract, in the New Kingdom around 1450 BC, is Sesostri III worshipped as a local god.

For the present-day visitor to Egypt, this highpoint of the pharaonic kingdom is almost invisible. Of the pyramids in Lisht, Illahun, Hawara, and Dahshur, all that survives are unprepossessing piles of rubble. Temples of the New Kingdom and the Ptolemaic period lie on top of the buildings of the 12th Dynasty. However, indirectly the Middle Kingdom has remained present in its many colossal royal statues, which were reused and reworked by the Ramesses kings.

It was only with the Greek historical writings on ancient Egypt that 'Sesostri' was turned into an outstanding figure of the pharaonic kingdom.²⁰ Herodotus, who traveled in Egypt around 450 BC, in his history

19 Translation, after: Dietrich Wildung in: id.: *Sesostri und Amenemhet. Ägypten im Mittleren Reich*. Munich 1984, 200 [English version here is translated from the German].

20 Hermann Kees: Artikel Sesonchosis, Sesostri. In: Pauly-Wissowa: *Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* II/4 (1923), 1855–1876.

gives a detailed account of the great deeds of this heroic ruler. According to Herodotus, in his military campaigns he conquered Nubia, the Arabian peninsula, India, the Near East, Asia Minor, and the Balkans, in domestic politics he made a mark as a social and land reformer, and in the whole land he had temples built and canals dug.

Herodotus' image of Sesostri strongly influenced the writings of Aristotle (active 350–330 BC), Hecataeus (around 300 BC), Diodorus (active 50–30 BC), Strabo (active 23 BC–0), Pliny the Elder (AD 23–79) and Plutarch (AD 46–120), who embroider his report, and style Sesostri as the very model of a pharaoh. Diodorus, who calls him a “*neos Alexandros*,” summarizes thus: “In fact this king seems to have exceeded all who had ever lived in power and military deeds as well as in the size and number of artistic monuments and other works that he carried out in Egypt.”²¹ A late echo of this Sesostri legend is (literally) heard in no less than seven baroque Sesostri operas produced between 1709 and 1755.²²

The ancient Egyptian source for Herodotus' so successful Sesostri stories seems to be the hieroglyphic text of a stele (now in Berlin),²³ on which Sesostri III gives a report on his Nubian politics. This text, translated for the Greek visitor by an Egyptian interpreter and in many parts not understood correctly by Herodotus, can be detected repeatedly behind Herodotus' phrasing as the source of his information.

The pseudo-historical figure of the hero Sesostri created by Herodotus also gets mixed up in Greek, Roman, and post-classical historical writing with the similar-sounding name of a pharaoh Sesonchosis-Sesoosis, behind whom the historical Sheshonq I (946–925 BC) can be recognized.²⁴

Long before Cy Twombly in 2000 completed his “painting in ten parts” and exhibited it under the title *Coronation of Sesostri* in the Gagosian

21 Claude Obsomer: *Les campagnes de Sésostri dans Hérodote*. Bruxelles 1989, 175.

22 Reference from Sonia Focke, Ägyptisches Museum München.

23 Obsomer 1989, op. cit.; Stephan J. Seidlmayer (ed.): *Pharao setzt die Grenzen*. Berlin 1999, 11–12.

24 In the autumn of 2012 a colloquium was held at the Institut für Ägyptologie of the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich, on the topic “Sesostri—Scheshonq—Sesonchosis. Ein internationaler Held und sein Nachwirken” (publication in preparation with Brill publishers, ed. by Friedhelm Hoffmann and Troy Sagrillo).

Gallery on Madison Avenue in New York,²⁵ the name ‘Sesostris’ occurs in his work. In 1974 lotus blossoms bear the inscription “BARGE OF SESOTRIS II” and “VEHICLE OF SESTORIS II”, and a sun pictogram “SOLAR CAR OF SESOTRIS II”.²⁶ In 1981 there follow titles and inscriptions such as “Coronation of Sesostris”²⁷ and (already in 1980) “Ramses”.²⁸ The incorrect spellings of the name Sesostris, and the selection of the historically colorless Sesostris II, can probably be taken as indications that Twombly concerned himself only cursorily with the Sesostris kings.

About the origin of *Coronation of Sesostris* the artist reports:

When I work, I work very fast, but preparing to work can take any length of time. It can even be a year. Now things sort of fall into place ... you know like the *Coronation of Sesostris* paintings. They were started in Bassano and hung upstairs for years [in Rome]. I like the sun disk because I managed to do very childlike painting, very immediate. Then I took them to Virginia and finished them—wound up at the end with a detail of Degas’s *The Cotton Exchange at New Orleans*. How it got in there, I don’t know, but it’s one of my favourite sets.²⁹

On the title of the complex of works, this statement by the artist himself offers no information. However, in an interview he revealed that he was very fond of the sound and the written form of the name ‘Sesostris,’ and by this he indirectly drops the hint that it was not images that he associated with ‘Sesostris,’ but rather that this name was familiar to him from reading literature on ancient Egypt. However, before the work on

25 Donald Kennison (ed.): *Cy Twombly. Coronation of Sesostris*. Gagosian Gallery New York 2000.—Cf. also on the cycle of paintings Yve-Alain Bois: Cy Twombly. In: Alison M. Gingeras / Jack Bankowsky (ed.): *Where are we going? Un choix d’œuvres de la Collection François Pinault*. Venise 2006, 176–187 and Mary Jacobus: Time-Lines: Rilke and Twombly on the Nile. In: *Tate Papers Issue 10* (2008). London 2008.

26 YL VI 94–103 (from 1974) and YL VII 134–141 (from 1981). Cf. Leeman 2005, 217–222.

27 YL VII 158–159.

28 Ibid., 110–113.

29 London 2008, 50 (interview with Nicholas Serota in September and December 2007).

*Coronation of Sesostri*s was completed in 2000, only two monographs included the name of this king in their title.³⁰

An answer to the question of how the work relates to the title must be based on viewing the ten large canvases³¹ in the sequence of their hanging as prescribed by the artist himself:

Part I: Sun as monochrome circle at the lower edge of the picture

Part II (cf. 131, ill. 12): Sun on two small wheels. Text: *SOLAR BARGE / OF / SESOSTRIS*

Part III: Intensively colored sun in the center of the picture. Text: *Eros weaver of myths / Eros sweet and bitter / Eros bringer of pain*

Part IV (cf. 133, ill. 13): Sun in red and gold. Text: [...] *of SESOSTRIS*

Part V: Ship in explosion of light. Text: [...] *bringer of pain*

Part VI: Two dozen brilliantly red blossoms frame a long text (ill. 3):

*when they leave
do you think they hesitate
turn and make a farewell Sign
Some gesture of regret*

*when they leave
the Music is loudest
the sun high*

*and you, dizzy with wine
befuddled with being,
Sink into your body
as though it were real
as if yours to keep*

*you neither see their going
nor hear their
Silence*

Part VII: Two ships, dissolving into points of light

Part VIII (cf. p. 126, ill. 6): Ship, monochrome. Text: *Eros, weaver of*

³⁰ Kurt Lange: *Sesostri*s. Munich 1958; Wildung 1984 (in German), op. cit.

³¹ Height from 201.5 to 207 cm, width from 136.5 to 247 cm.



3 Cy Twombly: *Coronation of Sesostris*, 2000, Part VI, acrylic, paint stick, wax crayon, lead pencil on canvas, 203.7 × 155.6 cm, Pinault Collection

myths / Eros sweet and bitter / [...] bringer [...]

Part IX: Ship, monochrome. Text above wavy line: *Leaving / Paphos / ringed with / waves*

Part X: Three-stepped black area. Inscription: *Eros weaver of myths / Eros sweet and bitter / Eros bringer of pain*

Parts I to IV represent the rise and, in increasing colorfulness, radiance of the sun. In Parts V and VII the sun motif is superseded by ships in bright, shining colors. In Part VII the interpreters see the climax of the cycle, as a *subito sforzando* citing Turner and Monet.³² Parts VIII and IX, with the ship motif's loss of color, announce the end of the series of pictures, which is presented in Part X as a black stepped motif. As hung at the Punta della Dogana, Part I is next to Part X, so the course of the work forms a closed circle—with no start and no end.

Cy Twombly in *Coronation of Sesostris* links two autonomous motifs—sun and ship—into a single 'set' to form a thematic and artistic unity. That the omnipresence of this pair of motifs in the imaginative world of the ancient Egyptians was in the artist's mind while composing *Coronation of Sesostris* is clearly indicated by the Egyptian king's name in the title of the work. The moment that prompted this could well have been the cosmic drama of the spectacular sunrises and sunsets that Cy Twombly had already experienced day after day on his first journey to Egypt in early 1962, along with the ships on the Nile alongside him on the voyage from Aswan to Abu Simbel, through the Nile Valley in Nubia, at that time not yet inundated. He not only encountered sun and ships as striking impressions of Egyptian everyday life, but also met them everywhere in his visits—documented in photographs—to the temples of Upper Egypt and Nubia.

Beyond the general coincidence of the double motif of sun and ship in *Coronation of Sesostris* and in the everyday iconography of ancient Egypt, an iconological analysis of the *Coronation* motifs reveals striking analogies to the ancient Egyptian models. The ship of Part VIII (ill. 6) is found on vase paintings³³ (ill. 4) and rock art³⁴ (ill. 5). In many tomb images of

³² David Schapiro in Kennison 2000, op. cit., 10.

³³ Flinders Petrie: *Corpus of prehistoric pottery and palettes*. London 1917; id.: *Prehistoric Egypt*. London 1920.

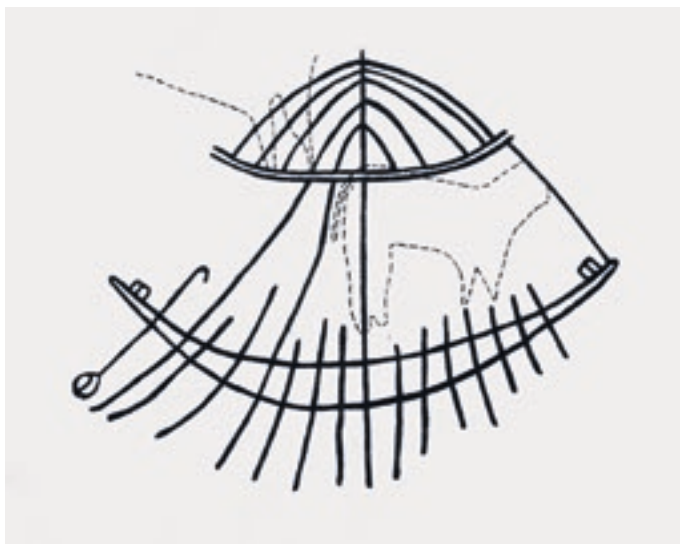
³⁴ Hans A. Winkler: *Rock-Drawings of Southern Upper Egypt*, I. London 1938, 35–39, pl. XXXIII–XLI; Pavel Červíček: *Felsbilder des Nord-Etbai, Oberägyptens und Unternubiens*. Wiesbaden 1974, 98–138.

the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms, the owner of the tomb sails in a papyrus boat through the realm of the afterlife. In the colorful reliefs of the royal tombs,³⁵ the sun god stands in a barge in order to traverse the twelve hours of the night until the sun's rising in the morning (ill. 7). In the burial treasure of Tutankhamun, which Cy Twombly may have seen in the museum in Cairo, there is a large wooden barge—illustrated frequently in publications—on whose empty throne the king was to re-



4 Painted vessel with representation of ship. Ceramic. H. 20.4 cm. Negade II Culture, ca. 3200 BC, Munich, Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst

35 Erik Hornung: *Tal der Könige*. Düsseldorf/Zurich 1999, 119–134.



5 Rock image with representation of ship. H. 40 cm.
Sharab near Edfu. Probably around 3000 BC



6 Cy Twombly: *Coronation of Sesostris*, 2000, Part VIII, acrylic, paint stick, wax crayon, lead pencil on canvas, 207×246.7 cm, Pinault Collection



7 Mythological papyrus: sun barge. Painting on papyrus. H. 9 cm.
Third Intermediate Period, ca. 900 BC, London, British Museum



8 Barge of the Sun God. Wood, painted. L. 120 cm. From the tomb of
Tutankhamun in the Valley of the Kings. New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty,
ca. 1330 BC, Cairo, Egyptian Museum

enact the sun's course (ill. 8).³⁶ The pyramid texts of the Old Kingdom, frequently translated and published, describe this celestial journey of the pharaoh: "He rises into the sky among his brothers, the gods ... He settles down ... on an empty seat that is in the ship of Rê ... He rows in the sky in your ship, o Rê, he punts in your ship, o Rê."³⁷ The Egyptian connotations of Cy Twombly's ship motif become especially clear in the sculpture, created in 1985, of a boat with mast half lowered, titled *Winter's Passage: Luxor*.³⁸ In other works by Twombly one might also see reflections of experiences in Egypt: the *Lepanto* (cf. pp. 262–263, ill. 4.1–4.3) and *Temeraire* pictures call to mind in their composition and motifs the extensive relief cycle of the Battles of the Sea Peoples on the outer walls of the Temple of Ramesses III in Medinet Habu³⁹ (ill. 9), which the artist may have seen at the site and in the library and archives of the 'Luxor Headquarters' of the Oriental Institute of Chicago University, where he was a frequent and long-staying guest during his stays in Luxor.

The sun motif, so closely linked to the ship, is omnipresent in the religious iconography of Egypt. On stelae and coffins the sun disk in a barge symbolizes the circular course of life. The astronomical motifs of the relief cycles on the ceilings of rooms in temples⁴⁰ represent the course of the heavenly bodies as a regatta of celestial barges (ill. 10). An irritating detail in this context is exhibited by Part II (ill. 12). The sun is set on a small wagon, and the inscribed text accompanying it names the motif—as already in one of the lotus motifs⁴¹—as a "solar barge". The Celtic sun wagon comes to mind as an inspiration, but it is much more obvious to think of the many-oared barges set on a wagon from the tomb of Queen Ahhotep, the work of an ancient Egyptian silversmith of the period around 1550 BC, which are displayed at a central point in the Cairo Museum and are illustrated in many publications (ill. 11).⁴²

36 Nicholas Reeves: *The Complete Tutankhamun*. London 1990, 142–145.

37 English translation from the German of: Adolf Erman. In: Adolf Erman: *Die Literatur der Ägypter*. Leipzig 1923, 27.

38 NDR S I 75 and 76; Brandhorst 2010, 133.

39 Epigraphic Survey (ed.): *Medinet Habu I* (Oriental Institute Publications VIII). Chicago 1930, pl. 37.—Cf. HB V 11 and *ibid.*, 1.

40 Otto Neugebauer / Richard Parker: *Egyptian astronomical texts and representations I–III* (Brown Egyptological Studies). London 1960–1964.

41 See above, n. 26.

42 Émile Vernier: *Bijoux et orfèvreries* (Catalogue Général des antiquités égyptiennes du Musée du Caire). Cairo 1927, 216–218, pl. XLIX; Mohamed Saleh /



9 Battle of Ramesses III with the Sea Peoples. Relief cycle in the Temple of Medinet Habu. New Kingdom, 20th Dynasty, ca. 1160 BC



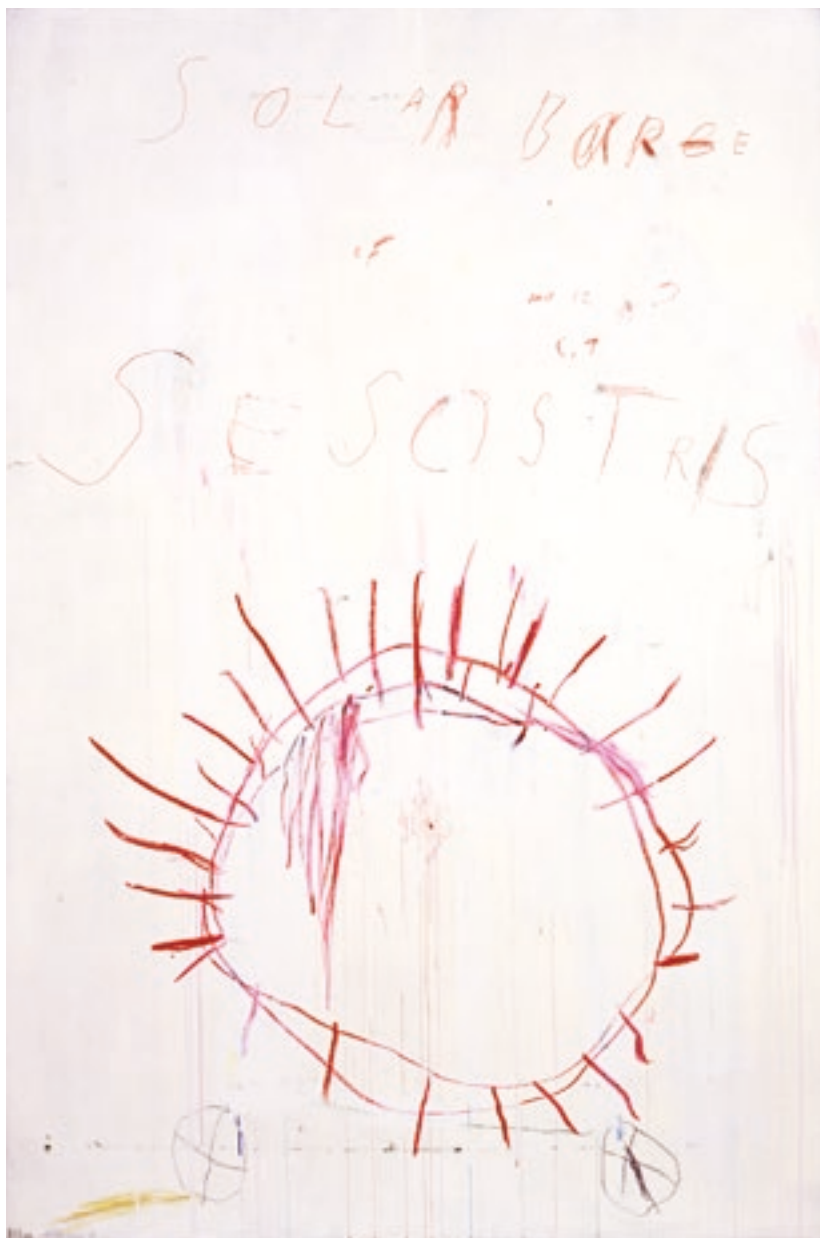
10 Star gods sail across the sky. Ceiling reliefs of the hypostyle in the Temple of Hathor in Dendera, ca. AD 30



11 Model boat. Gold, silver, bronze, wood. L. 43.3 cm. From the tomb of Queen Ahhotep in Western Thebes. New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty, ca. 1550 BC, Cairo, Egyptian Museum

As well as the iconographic Egyptianisms of ‘ship’ and ‘sun,’ the structure, too, of the ten-part work points back to ancient Egypt. The segmentation of a course of action into individual pictorial fields is the fundamental design principle of Egyptian wall paintings. They are to be read like a text whose textual building blocks only yield a meaning in the ‘con-text’. Just as an ancient Egyptian text has no word-dividers, so also in the *Coronation* cycle the spaces between the individual pictorial fields do not divide but join. Image and text: this pair of terms characterizes another analogy between Cy Twombly’s work and Egyptian art, namely the integration of texts into the pictorial concept. Hieroglyphic texts are integral elements of a *Gesamtkunstwerk* in Egyptian two-dimensional art—reliefs and painting—but also in sculpture. The clearest example is the ‘stelophore’ statue-type: the kneeling figure holds before it a stela,

Hourig Sourouzian: *The Egyptian Museum Cairo*. Mainz 1986, no. 123; illustrated in, among other places, the very widely circulated “Pelican History of Art” by William Stevenson Smith from 1958 and in a second edition in 1981: William Stevenson Smith: *The Art and Architecture of Ancient Egypt* (Pelican History of Art). Harmondsworth / Baltimore / Mitcham 1958 (1981), 125, ill. 84(A).



12 Cy Twombly: *Coronation of Sesostris*, 2000, Part II, acrylic, wax crayon, lead pencil on canvas, 206.4 × 139.1 cm, Pinault Collection

which bears the text spoken by the person represented—as it were, the soundtrack to the three-dimensional image, a visualization of the spoken word. On the canvases of the *Coronation* a direct causal link between text components and image is present only in Part II with the text “Solar barge of Sesostris”, so there we may speak of a ‘caption’ to the sun motif. The other texts cite the Greek authors Sappho (Parts III, V, VIII, X) and Alcman (Part IX) and—abridged and slightly altered in phrasing by Twombly—the contemporary American author Patricia Waters⁴³ (Part VI; cf. ill. 3). Without direct reference to the image, these texts add an autonomous component to the composition; just as they do not comment upon the image, so neither is each image an illustration of the text; yet the artist sets them in a shared web of relations by creating a sphere of tension between image and text.

In the two instances of the name of Sesostris (Parts II, IV [ill. 13]) there is no obvious causal link to the motif of the sun. Likewise the two textual elements of the work’s title—“Coronation” and “Sesostris”—stand autonomously above the iconography and formal structure of the work as a whole and its “ten parts.” The title *Coronation of Sesostris*, used already by Twombly in the 1960s, attests his decades of engagement with the thoughtworld of ancient Egypt, which was probably nourished more by the study of literature than through the direct encounter with the works of ancient Egyptian art in museum visits and journeys to Egypt. Cy Twombly’s reception of Egypt takes place at an intellectual level. In this he differs fundamentally from the modernist and contemporary artists mentioned at the outset, for whom the structure and iconography of ancient Egyptian art were the sources of inspiration.

It is not very likely that Cy Twombly was prompted to use the work title *Coronation of Sesostris* by an ancient Egyptian model. The only source that links Sesostris (I) to a royal coronation is a badly damaged manuscript from the collection of *Dramatic Ramesseum Papyri*; only in the commentary to the text in the first publication in 1924⁴⁴ are the king’s name and coronation mentioned.⁴⁵ It is hardly to be believed that Cy Twombly in his visits to the Luxor Headquarters of the Oriental Institute of Chicago University or in a library in Italy or America stumbled upon

⁴³ David Schapiro in Kennison 2000, op. cit., on p. 29 quotes the poem interpreted by Twombly.

⁴⁴ Kurt Sethe: *Dramatische Texte zu altaegyptischen Mysteryspielen*. Leipzig 1928.

⁴⁵ This was suggested by Thierry Greub in an email to the author of May 9, 2012.



13 Cy Twombly: *Coronation of Sesostris*, 2000, Part IV, acrylic, wax crayon, lead pencil on canvas, 206.1 × 246.4 cm, Pinault Collection

this specialist publication in German. It was not until 80 years after the first publication that these papyrus fragments, which have not played a central role in Egyptological research, were discussed again.⁴⁶ The coronation of the king is not one of the standard themes of ancient Egyptian texts or images and has so far attracted little attention in Egyptology. The coronation ritual can be reconstructed from numerous pieces of detailed information, but as a complete rite it is transmitted only in two relief sequences of the 18th Dynasty.⁴⁷

The network of references that weave together the work and its title thus remains loose. *Coronation of Sesostri*s is not a history painting like the *Lepanto* cycle, nor an illustration of an ancient text like *Hero and Leandro*,⁴⁸ or *Fifty Days at Iliam*.⁴⁹ ‘Sesostri’ is for Cy Twombly a synonym for ancient Egypt. In good Herodotean tradition he calls by this name the manifold Egyptian associations of the sequence of images, the formal structure of the pictorial fields to be read one after the other, the parataxis of image and text, the motifs ‘sun’ and ‘ship’ as representations of the eternal circle of life. These two leitmotifs of the *Coronation of Sesostri*s set up in mutual opposition the bittersweet farewell rhetoric of the blocks of text from Sappho, Alcman, and Patricia Waters opposed to an optimistic view of the world. ‘Sesostri’ stands for the ancient Egyptian belief in immortality, ‘coronation’ for the triumph of the light, to which Cy Twombly has given radiant artistic expression in the center of his “painting in ten parts,” crowning the many links to Egypt in his oeuvre as a whole.

ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

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2, 4, 7 photo: D. Wildung.

46 Joachim Quack: Zur Lesung und Deutung des Dramatischen Ramesseumpapyrus. In: *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 133 (2006), 72–89.

47 Winfried Barta: Königskrönung. In: Wolfgang Helck / Eberhard Otto (ed.): *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* III. Wiesbaden 1979, 531–533.

48 See on this the contribution of Lisa Hopkins in this volume.

49 See on this the contribution of Joachim Latacz in this volume.

5 Červíček 1974, op. cit.

8-10 photo: Uni Dia Verlag.

11 Vernier 1925, op. cit, pp. 216–218, pl. XLIX.



1 Installation view of Cy Twombly's *Fifty Days at Iliam*, Bassano in Teverina, 1978, 10 parts, oil paint, wax crayon, lead pencil on canvas, various dimensions, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art (visible here are Parts IV to VIII and sections of III and IX), situation 1989–2016

JOACHIM LATACZ

CY TWOMBLY WITH ACHILLES AT TROY

For Gottfried Boehm on his 70th birthday

I THE BASIC DATA

*Fifty Days at Iliam*¹ (ill. 1) was created between the summer of 1977 and the summer of 1978 at Bassano in Teverina, a village of 1200 souls on ancient Etruscan soil in the valley of the Tiber about 60 km north of Rome. The work is part of Twombly's second classical period and in essence concludes it.²

1 On the seeming mistake in the last word in the title see n. 82.—'Ilium' is not just "a Latin name for Troy" (Randy Kennedy: American Artist Who Scribbled a Unique Path. In: *The New York Times*, 6 July 2011, A1, online: http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/06/arts/cy-twombly-american-artist-is-dead-at-83.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 [30 August 2012]), but the late Latin name form of the Greek 'Ilion'. This form itself goes back to the Homeric 'Ilios' (source of the title 'Iliás', to be understood with 'poiésis', i.e. 'poem of Ilios'), which arose from the form 'Wilios', by which the Bronze Age Greeks represented the original (Anatolian) form (which is unknown to us) of the place name, while the Bronze Age Hittites called the place 'Wilusa'.—*Ilios* rather than *Troia* was originally the principal name used in Greek (in the *Iliad* 106 times, *Troiê* only 53 times; the two names are metrical variants in Homer; for more detail see Joachim Latacz: *Troy and Homer. Towards a Solution of an Old Mystery*. Oxford, 2004, 92–100).—For much information and numerous suggestions I warmly thank Thierry Greub (Cologne).

2 *Virgil* (1973)—*Sesostris* (1974)—*Venus, Apollo, Narcissus, Dionysus, Apollo and the Artist, Mars and the Artist, Pan* (all 1975)—*Untitled (Sappho)*, *Idilli* (both 1976)—*Thyrsis* (1977)—*Fifty Days at Iliam* (1978).—In the 1960s these had been preceded by (among others): *Triumph of Galatea* (1961)—*Rape of the Sabines* (1961–1963)—*Leda*

The cycle (we will come back to this designation of the work) consists of ten large-scale colored compositions of differing dimensions, each on a 3 m high surface—painted in oil paint, wax crayon, charcoal, and pencil on canvas. It was first exhibited in November 1978 at the Lone Star Foundation in New York. Subsequently, in 1989, it was donated to the Philadelphia Museum of Art,³ where it was given its own room, opened in 1989 (ills. 2.1–2.3). The hanging of the work was arranged and authorized in its current form by Twombly himself⁴—a fact of no small importance, as we shall see.

The cycle is not Twombly's first engagement with the theme of Troy or the *Iliad*. It was preceded by—leaving aside untitled designs—among other things a triptych with the title *Ilium (One Morning Ten Years Later)* in 1964 (ill. 3, central part), and two large-scale compositions with the titles *Achilles Mourning the Death of Patroclus* and *Vengeance of Achilles* (ill. 4), both in 1962. Thus Twombly had already been prompted to produce realizations of this theme at an early age, at latest at 30,—16 years before our cycle, which was created when he was approaching 50. Afterwards, so far as can be judged from the list of his works by Bastian⁵ and the Twombly monograph by Leeman,⁶ he did not address the theme again. Perhaps this implies not just a general shift in his interests,⁷ but

and the Swan (1962)—*Achilles Mourning the Death of Patroclus* (1962)—*Vengeance of Achilles* (1962)—*Catullus* (1962)—*Venus Anadyomene* (1962)—*Birth of Venus* (1963)—*Nine Discourses on Commodus* (1963)—*Ilium (One Morning Ten Years Later)* (1964)—*School of Athens* (1964)—*Cnidian Venus* (1967)—*8 Odi di Orazio* (1968).

3 Cf. Ann Temkin et al.: *Twentieth-Century Painting and Sculpture in the Philadelphia Museum of Art*. Philadelphia 2000, 133; online on the website of the Philadelphia Museum of Art: <http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/85717.html> (12 July 2013): "Gift (by exchange) of Samuel S. White 3rd and Vera White, 1989".

4 HB IV 13, pp. 68–83; cf. Langenberg 1998, 176, transl.: "The ten pictures fill one whole room of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, where they were hung symmetrically, in accordance with the artist's concept", transl. Twombly generally checked the presentation of his works himself: "In Houston he designed the Cy Twombly Gallery together with Renzo Piano, in Munich in the Museum Brandhorst he also jointly designed the Lepanto gallery and observed the picture-hanging in each case" (Thierry Greub / Cologne, by email, transl.).

5 HB I–V.

6 Leeman 2004, 314 f.

7 "By the time the eighties' concern with history caught up with Twombly, though, he had already moved on, away from the realm of myths, bards, and battles toward water, sky, and flowers." (New York 1994, 46).



2.1-2.3 Installation view of Cy Twombly's *Fifty Days at Iliam*, 1978, 10 parts, oil paint, wax crayon, pencil on canvas, various dimensions, Philadelphia Museum of Art (2.1 parts II-V, 2.2 IV-VIII, and 2.3 VII-X), situation 1989-2016



3 Cy Twombly: *Ilium (One Morning Ten Years Later)*, Rome, 1964, 3 parts, Part II, lead pencil, oil paint, wax crayon on canvas, 199 × 288.5 cm, Private Collection, Courtesy Gagosian Collection, New York



4 Cy Twombly: *Vengeance of Achilles*, Rome, 1962, oil paint, lead pencil on canvas, 300 × 175 cm, Zurich, Kunsthaus Zürich

also that he felt that everything relevant to the theme had been said in the *Fifty Days* cycle.

II THE BACKGROUND TO THE WORK: CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY

Cy Twombly felt a deep connection to classical antiquity. The apt headline to Twombly's obituary in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in Australia was "With his feet on classical ground".⁸ Hardly any of his obituaries omitted to stress this close link of Twombly to classical culture.⁹ It was one of the

⁸ Morgan 2011, in the main text that follows, is even more precise: "Cy Twombly spoke of his enduring fascination with the classical world when he and Edmund Capon [Director of the New South Wales Gallery in Sydney] spent a memorable day together a few years ago" (Joyce Morgan: With his feet on classical ground. A passion for history helped the revered artist Cy Twombly leave a lasting impression. In: *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 July 2011, online: <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/with-his-feet-on-classical-ground-20110706-1h2d2.html> [30 August 2012]).

⁹ Examples: Randy Kennedy (Kennedy 2011): "[his] poetic engagement with antiquity"; Stephanie Cash (Stephanie Cash: Cy Twombly, Legendary Scribbler, Dead Age 83. In: *Art in America*, 7 July 2011, online: <http://www.artinamerica.com/news-opinion/news/2011-07-05/cy-twombly-obituary/> [30 August 2012]): "... his works were informed by antiquity and classical literature"; Christopher Masters (Cy Twombly obituary. In: *The Guardian*, 6 July 2011, online: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2011/jul/06/cy-twombly-obituary> [30 August 2012]): "Twombly's yearning for antiquity". An overview of Twombly's complete oeuvre shows that this is not some later fixation that was subsequently grafted on: among the various different areas of inspiration—the sphere of scribbling, the sphere of erotica, and so on—the fascination of the world's ancient civilizations forms the *basso ostinato* of Twombly's work. He himself wrote in 1952, "For myself the past is the source ..." (from his application to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts for a scholarship to Europe; New York 1994, 56 n. 48). Varnedoe (New York 1994, 35) speaks aptly of "the antique heritage he [Twombly] treasures", and of his "idea of *approaching* and *revivifying* the culture of the past through what appeared merely to mar it [...]" (ibid., 29–30; emphasis: JL). Gottfried Boehm has also referred repeatedly to Twombly's fascination by "cultural memory [*kulturelle Gedächtnis*]" (so Varnedoe, ibid., 51), for example in 1987: "[...] paper, text, and book, the recorded world of culture and its history—entrusted to the memorial capacity of writing—form a source of his art. [... *Papier, Text und Buch, die aufgeschriebene Welt der Kultur und ihre Geschichte – das dem Gedächtnis der Schrift Anvertraute – (stellen) einen*

reasons why Twombly in 1957, at the age of 29, moved to Italy, where he lived, first in Rome, then in Bassano in Teverina, and from the 1980s in his house in Gaeta, the ancient Caieta, on the Gulf of the same name in the Tyrrhenian Sea about 80 km north of Naples, until his death.

Given the rarity of this type of symbiotic connection between a modern artist and classical antiquity, one might expect that research on the reception of antiquity would already have taken an interest in Cy Twombly. That has hitherto not, so far as one can tell, been the case.¹⁰ Accordingly, what follows can only be a first, groping attempt. It will naturally

Quellbereich seiner Kunst (dar)"] (Del Roscio 2002, 180); "Twombly's pictures [...] attest to and activate the mythological memory [...]" (ibid., 183).—Nonetheless, there is even today no synoptic study of 'Cy Twombly and Antiquity' (cf. now Greub 2012 and Greub 2016); scattered material is offered by Leeman 2004, esp. in Chapter IV ('A Mythography of Desire'); however, a real familiarity with the ancient world is not on offer here; the same is true of Kirk Varnedoe, in New York 1994 (e.g. to speak of "antiquity's *epic* spirit" [57; emphasis JL] is downright incomprehensible for a classical scholar: the Greco-Roman era of human civilization, which at around 1500 years lasted three times as long as the modern period, can of course not be reduced to a single component).

10 For this reason all the more emphasis should be given to the work of an art historian who, although clearly without professional training as a Hellenist, in her 1997 Munich doctoral dissertation has already made good progress on the question of the material that underlies the cycle: Langenberg 1998, 176–181. Fortunately I first got sight of this work, with the help of Thierry Greub, six weeks after my paper in Cologne and after the print version was complete—fortunately, because the author had in some cases reached the same or comparable observations and inferences as I had done, so the agreements in findings reached independently may be taken to reinforce the interpretation offered here. The relevant passages are noted in the rest of this paper.—Parenthetically, it may be noted that the numerous incomprehensible errors—e.g. "The *Iliad* describes the last [!] 50 decisive years [!] of the ten-year war ..." (176, transl.); on KASSANDRA (on Part 7 of the cycle): "The words of the warner, who already [!] in the *Odyssey* had predicted the fall of Troy" (179, transl.; intended is *Odyssey* 11.422, where Agamemnon, dying himself, hears the dying voice of Cassandra, done to death by Clytaemestra, without being able to help; there is no trace of a prophecy of the Fall of Troy)—may be mentioned here as an example of many interpreters' extreme unfamiliarity with the ancient subjects treated by Twombly (Varnedoe is entirely correct to speak, in New York 1994, 52, of "this most literate [...] of artists"); when the extent of an interpreter's knowledge and level of education falls far behind that of the artist whom he 'interprets', interpretation of art descends into farce.

be limited to what a philologist and Homer specialist can offer by way of potential illumination of the background. Specifically iconographic questions—the brushwork, coloring, etc.—and, even more so, aesthetic appreciations and theoretical suggestions at the higher levels of professional interpretation will be not touched on at all, or only as hints; they remain the province of the scholar of art. The impression that unavoidably arises from this, of a certain simplicity in the interpretation, will have to be accepted. All that is hoped is that the elementary-pragmatic perspective presented here may cast a somewhat brighter light upon the material that underlies Twombly's cycle, and that this can lay a foundation that may prove helpful to the professional analysis and interpretation in art theory.

Even as a child Twombly was a tireless and enthusiastic reader,¹¹ and he remained one to his death. His labyrinthine house in Gaeta was often described by visitors as a kind of Alexandrian museum of the modern age, in which the cultural memory of humanity was brought together in a single, vast ensemble.¹² An adequate understanding of Twombly's mythological compositions in all their depth and their wide web of roots, on the basis of which one could link the hints that can be seen on the surface to the substructure underlying it and so unite them into the weave and whirl of associations experienced by the artist in the process of creation, is probably only possible for the viewer who can come even *close* to Twombly's knowledge of literature and mythology.

To grasp in full the abundance of his associative references, which are further enriched and refracted by centuries of reception and which are in general decidedly subjective and often unexpectedly novel, in the sense of unconventional—to grasp this abundance in full will even then hardly be possible. Twombly's compositions—including, or especially, those that refer to classical antiquity—will hence ultimately always remain enigmatic,

11 Twombly's father was a sportsman and later sports teacher, his son, however, "was much more bookish than athletic as a child": Kennedy 2011, op. cit. References to Twombly's unusually deep historical and literary knowledge are found in almost every publication on him.

12 See e.g. Niklas Maak: Zu Besuch bei Cy Twombly. Verschwunden in Italien. In: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 23 January 2005, online: <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/kunst/zu-besuch-bei-cy-twombly-verschwunden-in-italien-1214222.html> (30 August 2012): "(he) spends [...] most of the time in Gaeta, in this house that is a house like a work of art by Twombly: labyrinthine, with endless corridors packed full of books and works of art and found objects" (transl.).

and hence open, though, it may be a major advance in understanding Twombly if precisely this point is realized (and accepted), of course.¹³

III THE DESIGNATION OF THE WORK AS A WHOLE¹⁴

Most of Twombly's compositions bear no title (*Untitled*). However, wherever he does give a title, he has thereby left a clue: he is guiding the scope of reference, reception, and interpretation. As far as can be seen, however, in *multi-part* works he generally refrained from using a summarizing term for the work. Yet, it is clear that in also these cases such designations might guide interpretation. Exhibition catalogs, art criticism, books, and essays have in this case filled the gap *ad libitum*. Thus in the research literature on *Fifty Days at Iliam* one finds various terms: the most frequent is 'cycle'. Next come 'polyptych', 'series', 'ensemble', even *Bilderreihe* ('row of pictures')¹⁵. Which of these designations Twombly himself

13 Edmund Capon (Joyce Morgan, op. cit.) formulated this complexity, and the difficulty in understanding that is linked to it (out of which usually develops rejection), with diplomatic obliquity: "Sometimes people need a little bit of help in recognising a great work of art that might be a bit unfamiliar." Even given the irony, that is still a superficial way to put it. On the principle, Gottfried Boehm (Del Roscio 2002, 181, emphasis: JL): "For we cherish the expectation—and quite a number of texts in art history pride themselves on it—that interpretation should translate the ambiguity of pictorial appearances into the clarity of linguistic explication. [...] Considering Twombly, who refuses to copy [...], such a procedure grasps little of what we actually see. [...] *wir hegen doch die Erwartung – und nicht wenige kunsthistorische Texte halten sich etwas darauf zugute –, daß Interpretation das Vieldeutige der bildlichen Erscheinung in die Eindeutigkeit einer sprachlichen Erklärung zu überführen habe. [...] Angesichts Twomblys, der nicht abbildet, [...] erfaßte ein solches Verfahren nur wenig von dem, was wir sehen*]" Nonetheless, to comprehend (approximately) at least this small thing is the goal of the present contribution.

14 The interest here is not in the designation of products of Twombly's artistic work in general—he himself insisted on their being called 'paintings' rather than 'drawings' or similar terms (see Leeman 2004, 308 n. 12)—but rather the most apt designation for the whole composition of *Fifty Days at Iliam*, i.e. the one closest to the presentation that was determined by Twombly himself (and hence the one that would probably be most likely to be endorsed by Twombly as an aid to interpretation, like the title).

15 Berlin 1994, 51 (thus the German translation; the original just has "pictures", New York 1994, 46).

would have accepted or chosen (if it were of any importance to him at all), can only be inferred. ‘Ensemble’ may be ruled out from the start: it is too general (an ‘aggregate’) and ultimately says nothing. ‘Series’ and *Bilderreihe* likewise drop out of contention: they are based on the possibility of endless continuation (‘serial’), which would be a crass contradiction to the completeness—with all ten parts in a single space specially reserved for them—that Twombly himself chose. ‘Polyptych’ (‘many-folded’, from Greek πτύσσω, *ptyssō*, ‘fold’) would stress ‘complexity’ in unity, which can be folded out and then back together again (‘Holy Trinity’ and so on). However, *Fifty Days at Iliam* forms a whole whose ten individual parts each stake a claim to their own steady, fixed place. This being the case, the designation in the volume of reproductions from 1979,¹⁶ “A painting in ten large parts”, is at first sight certainly the most apt, yet at the same time also the most simplistic (and the most roundabout). So all that is left is ‘cycle’. It is unlikely to be mere chance that the great majority of interpreters—in most cases, it would seem, spontaneously—have opted for this designation. It may indicate a subconscious, latent awareness that the work suits this designation. The Greek κύκλος, adopted as a loan-word into Latin as *cyclus*, originally meant simply ‘circle’, and so, like the geometrical figure, it does not stress the multi-part character (as would ‘diptych’, ‘triptych’, etc), but the unity. At an early stage the word was used also in the literary sphere: “The term *kyklos* was used among literary figures probably already in the fifth century BC to mean a ‘contents list’ (sometimes in verse) of ‘related matters involving a large quantity of material’.”¹⁷ In this definition ‘contents list’ and ‘related’ are decisive for the meaning: *kyklos/cyclus* primarily concerns (thematic and temporal) continuation, and the continuity of related matter that arises out of that continuation, with the scope of encompassing *all* of this related material.¹⁸ We shall return to this later.

16 HB *Iliam* (taken from the original edition by the Lone Star Foundation in New York City of 1979).

17 Joachim Latacz: Art. ‘Epic cycle’. In: *Brill’s New Pauly* (consulted as New Pauly Online): “*kýklos* was understood among the literati, probably as early as the 5th cent. BC, as a ‘synopsis’ (also in verse) of ‘interrelated events over a wide range of subject-matter’.”

18 Cf. e.g. ‘lunar cycle’ or similar.—The connotation of repetition or repeatability is secondary.

IV THE PRINCIPAL POINT OF REFERENCE: HOMER VIA POPE

Twombly provided the following notice to accompany the first exhibition in New York in 1979: "The painting *follows and reflects* incidents of *Homer's Iliad* in the translation of *Alexander Pope*".¹⁹

Here twin foundations of the cycle are cited, and the viewer is given the task of *knowing* this double foundation—if possible, to know it just as well (or as badly) as Twombly himself did—which is firstly Homer's *Iliad*, and secondly its translation by Pope.

Homer's *Iliad*, a work in verse in the genre, found worldwide, of 'heroic epic,' and Europe's first literary work, comprises 15,693 hexameters, which were subdivided by later Greek literary scholars—probably to facilitate their delivery, but also their reception—into 24 ἀοιδαί (*aidai*) or ῥαψωδίαί (*rhapsōidiai*), 'chants' of differing lengths,—a purely formal division that cuts up a homogeneous whole.²⁰ The *action*, knowledge of which is assumed, even in its detail, by the artist,²¹ is spread over fifty-one days (Twombly says 'Fifty Days' following Pope;²² the difference of one day is not important here).

The *theme* of this Homeric action is named already in the first line in startlingly lapidary fashion: 'The wrath of Achilles'. Thus it will not tell

19 HB Iliam, Impressum (emphasis: JL).

20 The last editor of a critical edition of the Greek original, the Oxford Hellenist Martin L. West, proceeds as follows: he maintains the traditional division into 24 parts (beginning the line numbering anew each time with 1), because it is of practical use for us, yet he does not graphically distinguish (with empty space, a new page, or similar signals) the 24 parts from each other, but has the text run on continuously ("*textum continuavi neque inter rhapsodias intervalla reliqui*": Martin L. West: *Homerus. Ilias*. Vol. primus. Stuttgartiae et Lipsiae MCMXCVIII, p. VI n. 3). It is not known when precisely the division into books was first made.

21 That means that the viewer endeavoring to understand the cycle, like the professional interpreter, is called upon to read in advance the *whole* of Homer's *Iliad*, like the artist himself. To stress here once again this basic precondition, however self-evident it ought to be, does not seem redundant.

22 Pope: Preface; in Mack (John Butt: *The poems of Alexander Pope*. London 1939–1969, 11 vols.—Vol. 7/8: *The Iliad of Homer*, ed. by Maynard Mack, 1967.—Vol. 9/10: *The Odyssey of Homer*, ed. by Maynard Mack, 1967), vol. 7, 5. As poetic licence, however, it needs no explanation: 'Fifty one days' would have sounded fussy in the present context.

the whole *Story of Troy*, which in the fiction of the saga chronology takes place over forty years, nor will the whole of the supposedly ten-year ‘Trojan War’ be told. Rather, what is to be related is just one small episode from the turn of the ninth to the tenth year of the war, namely the Wrath of Achilles. This wrath of Achilles with its *consequences*,²³ however, is sharpened and dramatized into the decisive crisis-point of the whole story of Troy. For the wrath of Achilles leads to the situation in which the whole Greek endeavor, the punishment and elimination of Troy as revenge for the abduction of Helen, and with it the fate of Troy—its continued existence or fall—, stands on a knife edge. This is made vividly and thrillingly clear by a rich repertoire of narrative means including—as well as a large number of direct speeches and dialogs—the weaving in of the *whole* story of Troy in flashbacks and foreshadowings. Through this extreme condensing of the long background story into a short foreground action, the primary audience, but also the later (ancient) readers, are kept in suspense from start to finish, even though they would long have known the story of Troy as a whole. (Attic tragedy would repeat this presentational strategy in its own way 250 years later.) At a second level the work accomplishes a sort of sociopolitical contribution, in that it reflects the problems of the times in which it was composed²⁴—again a paradigm for Attic tragedy. Above these two levels, however, there is a third, a meta-level. At this level the morphology and essence of the phenomenon ‘war’ as such is laid bare: What does war *mean*? How does it alter the human world? What does it do to individuals? This dimension of the work will be felt by every sensitive reader—and Twombly must be regarded as such. This is probably the main, if latent reason for the poem’s enormous influence and role as orientation point in European literature right into the present.

Twombly himself indicates that the basis of his cycle was the *Iliad* translation of Alexander Pope. Why he took as his basis precisely *this* translation, by then 250 years old, is not entirely certain. At the time the cycle was created, the most widely circulated modern translation in the English-speaking world was that of Richmond Lattimore in “a free six-beat

23 “The *wrath* sing, goddess, of Peleus’ son Achilles, the accursed wrath which brought *countless sorrows* upon the Achaeans, and *sent down to Hades many valiant souls of warriors*, and made the men themselves to be the *spoil* for dogs and birds of every kind...” (lines 1.1–5; transl. A.T. Murray, rev. William F. Wyatt, Loeb Classical Library, nos. 170–171, Cambridge, Mass., 1999; emphasis JL).

24 Joachim Latacz: Streit um Adels-Ideale. In: *DAMALS. Das aktuelle Magazin für Geschichte und Kultur* 33, 4/2001, 11–19 (now in: Latacz 2014, 251–259).

line", published in 1951 and still today ranked the classic English translation. Apparently Twombly once cited as the reason for his choice of Pope's translation its "frenzied energy" and its "headlong forward rush"²⁵ It may have seemed that way to him. However, it is also possible that he had read Pope's translation as a child and later he just stuck with it. In addition, in 1967, i.e. ten years before Twombly's cycle, an outstanding *new edition* of Pope's *Iliad* translation was published in two volumes.²⁶ It is very probable that Twombly used this edition.²⁷ To what extent Twombly knew the Greek *original* is not clear. The personal names inscribed in the pictorial compositions, at least, are almost 100% written in *Latin* letters and in the *Latin* name-forms used by Pope; as a complete one-off, a single Greek letter appears. Other indications point clearly in the same direction: Twombly's model, or at the very least his principal model, was the text of Pope.

Alexander Pope (1688–1744), a merchant's son from London, as a catholic at that period, the *Augustan Age* under Queen Anne, was barred from public educational institutions. He enjoyed private instruction at home, and now and again attended catholic private schools. In essence, however, he was an autodidact. At eight years of age he read Homer in the translation of Ogilby.²⁸ According to contemporary accounts, he read Greek and Latin by the age of 12, at which age his enthusiasm for Homer also began. After various poetic works of his own, in 1713, i.e. at the age of 25, he began his translation of the *Iliad*. It appeared in print in six successive years in 1715–1720. It was an outstanding commercial success and made Pope a rich man.

25 Cf. Varnedoe in: New York 1994, 45: "For direct inspiration, however, Twombly depended on the Alexander Pope translation of the *Iliad*, which he appreciates for its 'frenzied energy' and 'headlong forward rush' [...]" (the reference for this, on 63, n. 171, is: "Conversation with the artist."; cf. Langenberg 1998, 176). If Twombly did really say that, he may rather have been citing Pope, who characterizes Homer thus (see below, n. 64); this characterization of Homer was a common observation already in antiquity, see Horace, *Ars poetica* 148 f.: *semper ad eventum festinat et in medias res / non secus ac notas auditorem rapit* (*festinat* ~ 'hurries wildly', *rapit* ~ 'rushes forwards'; in the same sense already Aristotle, *Poetics* 1448b35 ["dramatically"] and 1460a9–11 [Homer "after only a brief prelude at once brings in a man or a woman"]). Whether one can accord the same qualities to Pope's *translation* is a matter of taste.

26 Mack in: Butt, op. cit., vols. 7/8.

27 Langenberg, too, used this edition (176, n. 49); however, she does not see that it was Twombly's work of reference.

28 John Ogilby: *Homer. His Iliads*. London 1760.

Before Pope's translation, the *Iliad* had been read in England in the 1611 translation of George Chapman. Chapman had translated the *Iliad* in rhyming acatalectic iambic pairs of heptameters. Pope, who kept Chapman at hand as his primary reference while he worked,²⁹ instead chose the so-called *Heroic Couplets* which were preferred in his time, that is, rhyming couplets in iambic pentameter. An example from Book One: The priest of Apollo, Chryses, comes into the Greeks' camp at the ships to ransom his daughter Chryseïs, who at present has to serve Agamemnon as trophy concubine, "and he [brings] with him ransom past counting".³⁰ In the Homeric original we read (*Iliad* 1.14 f.):

ὁ γὰρ ἦλθε θεὸς ἐπὶ νῆας Ἀχαιῶν
 λυσόμενός τε θύγατρα φέρων τ' ἀπερείσι' ἄποινα ...

Chapman, in 1611, had translated:³¹

Occasiond thus; Chryses the Priest, came to the fleete, to buy
 For presents of unvalued price, his daughters libertie ...

Lattimore, 250 years after Pope and ca. 25 years before Twombly, translates:

(since Atreus' son had dishonoured) Chryses, priest of Apollo,
 when he came beside the fast ships of the Achaeans to ransom
 back his daughter, carrying gifts beyond count ...

Robert Fagles in 1990 translates:³²

Yes, Chryses approached the Achaeans' fast ships
 to win his daughter back, bringing a priceless ransom ...
 ...

²⁹ Pope's annotations in an exemplar of Chapman's translation are extant, see Mack in: Butt, op. cit., vol. 10, 474–491.

³⁰ Transl. A.T. Murray, rev. William F. Wyatt, Loeb Classical Library, nos. 170–171, Cambridge, Mass., 1999.

³¹ *The Iliads of Homer, Prince of Poets. Never before in any language [sic] truly translated. With a comment uppon some of his chiefe places; Donne according to the Greeke By Geo. Chapman.* London [1611], p. 1. (Facsimile reprint: Amsterdam—New York, 1969.)

³² *Homer. The Iliad*, translated by Robert Fagles. Introduction and notes by Bernard Knox. Penguin Books USA 1991.

That is all poor enough stuff compared to the Homeric original. But in Pope this had turned into:

For Chryses sought with costly Gifts to gain
The Captive Daughter from the Victor's Chain.

This type of version, which—at least in the German-speaking world—today sounds childish,³³ inevitably throws out most of the poetic quality of the original.³⁴ The obligation to rhyme—in antiquity rhyme was not usual and was even frowned upon—in itself led to distortions of every kind. Accordingly, the famous Oxford Hellenist Richard Bentley, a contemporary of Pope's, wrote less than gently to him: "It is a pretty poem, Mr. Pope, [...] but you must not call it Homer."³⁵ But Pope's translation evidently appealed to Twombly. So much so, that he even read the essay

33 In Pope's time this was admittedly the usual type of translation in the English-speaking world, which was later in part adopted also by the German neoclassical poets; for the supple long-verse of Homer, however, it was, from a modern perspective, totally inadequate.

34 It has been shown that Pope used, as well as the English translations of Chapman, Ogilby, and around ten other translators, also the French translation by Anne Dacier (ed. Paris 1711) and its translation into English (London 1712) (Mack in: Butt, op. cit., vol. 7, p. XL, n. 5); Pope's coincidences, similarities, borrowings, and imitations, etc., have now been presented with almost unimaginable precision and exhaustiveness over nearly 100 pages (492–586) by William Frost in volume 10 of Butt's Complete Edition of Pope's oeuvre. The critics of Pope's translation "were to repeat for years that the translator had no Greek" (Mack in: Butt, op. cit., vol. 7, p. XLII). That was clearly going too far, but his knowledge of Greek, and in particular his knowledge of the *Homeric* language, which is not identical to the Attic Greek that in modern times has been taught worldwide as the standard form of Greek, were from a professional point of view rather modest, see on this Mack *ibid.*, vol. 7, *Introd.* p. XXXVI n. 1 ("... Pope was competent, though not learned, in Homeric Greek"), and more precisely pp. LXXXII–LXIIIIV; Pope himself spoke in a letter of 5.4.1708 (Mack *ibid.*, vol. 7, *Introd.* p. LXXXV) of his "knowledge of my own imperfectness in the Language".—The method of laying out existing translations side by side and putting together from them a new 'translation' was admittedly popular at that time. It has been resurrected today by so-called 'translators' and their publishers (usually with no quality control by someone qualified in the field). The public, including unsuspecting media, theater people etc, is defenseless and pays up—mostly for junk.

35 Mack in: Butt, op. cit., vol. 7, *Introd.*, p. XLII.

that Pope wrote to go with it. All this is reflected in Twombly's idea of the *Iliad* and thus in his cycle.

With this background knowledge of the version of the original text that was taken as a basis, we are in a position to estimate how much 'Homer' reached Twombly at all. The finer points of the poetry, certainly, were probably never truly perceived by him. What he will have grasped via Pope are the facts of the story, the great climaxes in the course of the narrative, and probably also the basic structure of the work. That, then, is also what will have shaped his cycle.

V THE INDIVIDUAL PARTS OF THE CYCLE

NO. 1: *SHIELD OF ACHILLES*

Even before entering the display space in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the visitor sees on the entrance wall, outside on the left, the *Shield of Achilles* (ill. 5).³⁶ The original title, *Achilles' Shield* has been scribbled by Twombly at top left above the object—as always, in Latin capital

36 Twombly, following Pope's translation, uses the *Latin* forms of the name, as was usual in English in Pope's time, and often still is today (e.g. 'Achilles' rather than the original Greek form 'Achilleus').—All the more important characters in the *Iliad* mentioned in what follows, both human and divine, are systematically recorded (under their original *Greek* names), and presented and explained according to their function in both *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, as well as, wherever it is useful, in Greek myth in general, sometimes in great detail, in the 'Basler Homer-Kommentar (Basel Homer Commentary)' (BK), ed. by Joachim Latacz and Anton Bierl, Berlin/Boston, 2000 ff. (available so far: Prolegomena and Commentaries to books 1, 2, 3, 6, 14, 16, 18, 19, 24; in English: Prolegomena and Commentaries to books 3, 6, 14, 19, 24; to be continued), Prolegomena, in the chapter 'Zum Figurenbestand der Ilias', 115–143 / Engl: 'Cast of Characters of the Iliad', 122–150 (gods: 115–132/122–139; humans: 133–143/140–150). This is supplemented in the same volume by an alphabetic 'Figuren-Index' (173–207) / Character index (204–235), which lists all characters that appear in the *Iliad*, both human and divine, with a full listing of the passages in the *Iliad* in which each character appears. In the present text, therefore, only the information most necessary for understanding in each case will briefly be given.—Twombly would have been able to use a (very rudimentary, but for his purposes probably sufficient) earlier form of such an index in Pope, the 'Index of Persons and Things' (Mack in: Butt, op. cit., vol. 8, 580–590); however, he was coming to it with what was anyway already an extensive prior knowledge of Greek mythology, as was still a matter of course in European-American education in his time.

letters—with what is for him rather amazing precision, in that he has even marked the possessive case of the name ‘Achilles’ with an apostrophe. The second letter of ACHILLES’ was first written in the Latin form as CH, but then an attempt was evidently made to write over it with a Greek Chi (X)—however, this was not done consistently. Among the other ten pieces Twombly always writes the name with the Latin CH, but evidently knows that the name in Greek is written with Chi, as can be seen from the fourth piece, where he writes the Homeric name of the Greeks, *Achaioi*, with Chi—the graphic form of which expresses the sound ‘eks’ in Latin. Whether this point—the occasional interspersing of Greek letters into the Latin inscriptions—should be accorded a special significance, must for the time being remain open.

By ‘Shield of Achilles’ Twombly is referring to Book 18 of the *Iliad*. This book contains 617 lines, almost half of which, 302 lines, are taken up by the story of the Shield of Achilles: when the Achaeans were in desperate straits, Achilles had sent his dearest friend Patroclus into battle in his place and with his troops. To increase the fear of the Trojans, he had let Patroclus put on his, Achilles’, armor and take up his, Achilles’, own weaponry—including his shield. But, Patroclus was killed by Hector, and all his arms and armor fell to the Trojans. Achilles, who now has neither armor nor shield any more, asks his mother, the sea goddess Thetis, to get him new equipment. Thetis climbs up to the seat of the gods, Olympus, and passes on the request to the smith-god Hephaestus. Hephaestus goes into his smithy and begins the work. First of all he makes a shield. In 132 lines Homer describes how Hephaestus fashions and decorates the shield. What is described is thus not a finished work, but the process of its fashioning. That in itself may well have sparked Twombly’s interest, given that he saw the essence of his creative work less in the product than in the act of production itself, in the processuality of the product’s *creation*.³⁷

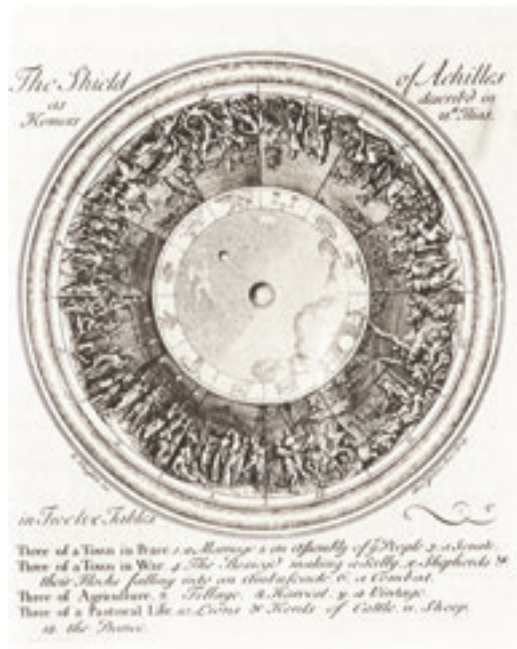
37 The scene of fashioning it (468–613) does not begin with a static description of the *smithy* but with the (metal-)artist Hephaestus himself: how he *enters* the smithy, how he *sets up* the 20 bellows and *commands* them to work, how they then, matching the pace of his work, *begin to blow*, how he *sets* bronze, lead, gold, and silver in the fire, *sets* the anvil onto the anvil block, and then *picks up* the great hammer with one hand, the tongs with the other: the artist is setting up his ‘studio’, his ‘atelier’, nothing stays ‘silent’, everything is set in motion: the work process begins. After this the nine (main) products of his fashioning (decorating) are introduced, on at least 13 times with a transitive verb of making (‘he wrought into it’, ‘he made into it’, ‘he set into it’, ‘he fashioned artfully



5 Cy Twombly: *Fifty Days at Iliam*, 1978, Part I: *Shield of Achilles*, oil paint (paint stick), wax crayon, oil-based house paint, lead pencil on canvas, 191.8 × 170.2 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art, gift (by exchange) of Samuel S. White 3rd and Vera White, 1989-90-1



6 Bronze shield from the Idaean Cave, Crete, Mus. Herakleion, Inv. Nr. 7"



7 Pope's attempted reconstruction of the Homeric shield

Homer has the god Hephaestus make a round shield. The roundness is stressed already in the second line of the description of the making of the shield, and is expressly repeated in its final line. That is not something self-evident. There were also large shields in oblong form that would cover the whole body—just like today, when all round the world police forces hold shields like these up against demonstrators. But, Achilles' shield was always designed to be circular. Five layers of metal are laid on top of each other over the leather core, with the outermost layer, visible from outside, probably of gold. This outer layer is then subdivided, beginning from the shield boss, into concentric bands that are divided from each other by narrow strips of decoration. The poet imagines that pictures are set into these bands by Hephaestus in inlay technique. A shield from Crete that is probably contemporary may serve as a comparison, although it admittedly has only *two* concentric bands (ill. 6). In Pope, Twombly would have read the essay accompanying the translation, *Observations on the Shield of Achilles*,³⁸ and found in it Pope's own attempt at a reconstruction³⁹ (ill. 7). Both examples are here offered merely to prompt the imagination. The Homeric shield is incomparably more artful.

In the *innermost* and widest band, which runs around the shield boss, the god fashions, so we are told, earth, sky, and sea—i.e. the three dimensions of the human world—and in the sky he sets sun, moon, and stars. The *outermost* band presents the circular river *Okeanós* ('Ocean'), which

into it'), and also in the inlaid 'images' that follow, as products in words, there frequently appears '(that) was made', '(that) was fashioned'. See on this Mark W. Edwards in: Geoffrey S. Kirk (ed.): *The Iliad. A Commentary. Volume V: books 17–20* (by Mark W. Edwards). Cambridge 1991, 209: "As usual in Homer a manufactured object is described by an account of the way in which it was made."—Incomprehensible remarks, therefore, by Leeman 2004, 95 (transl.): "The relation of Twombly's works to their sources must be understood as like the description of the Shield of Achilles by Homer [...]: as the ecphrasis of an impossible object." Instead of equating the artist with Hephaestus, Leeman here equates him to Homer (and the—in reality impossible—shield of Homer to the very real and existing sources of Twombly). The artist qua artist is anyway never a 'describer' but a 'maker': like Hephaestus here, he is *creator* ('creative'), not *descriptor* ('descriptive'). To that extent, even the traditional term 'Shield Description' is essentially mistaken; correct would be to say 'description of the fashioning of the shield'. Twombly's 'Fifty Days' are not a 'description' of fifty days at Ilios, but a *creation* of fifty days at Ilios.

³⁸ Mack in: Butt, op. cit., vol. 7, 358–370.

³⁹ Ibid., from 366.

forms the boundary of the world. In the bands between them, various scenes of human life are shown: a city at peace and a city at war, the agricultural year with ploughing, harvesting, and vintage, a herd of sheep with their herders threatened by lions, and finally a dancing place with youths and girls dancing surrounded by admiring spectators.

It is clear that such a work of art could never have really existed. It is after all not a work of human hands. Homer has it made by a god. It is thus—and again Twombly could have read this in Pope—“a complete *Idea of Painting*,⁴⁰ and a Sketch for what one may call an *universal Picture*” (Mack in: Butt, vol. 8, 363). That the attribution to *painting* would have sparked Twombly’s interest is obvious. And above all the terms ‘Idea’ and ‘universal’—for an abstract painter these are central. By ‘universal’, however, Twombly seems to have understood even more than Pope. For in Homer the Shield is ‘universal’ not only in the typological sense, but also in its content. Hephaestus sets on it, so to speak, a picture of the universe—the universe as understood in Homer’s time: the earth as a round disk, above it the vaulted sky, upon it the sea (that is, the Mediterranean), and this disk is bounded all around by the circular river Ôkeanós. As already mentioned, Twombly had evidently been impressed especially by its roundness. On none of the nine further parts in his cycle is there a round form of the perfection seen in the circle of the ‘Shield’.⁴¹

And, probably, it goes *even* further: the Shield shows the whole cosmos of the human world, predominantly in positive and peaceful scenes (the city at peace, agricultural life, pastoral life, festival and dance), but also in the threat to this peace (the besieged city, the lurking lion, a legal process among the citizens, i.e. a conflict). Constant threat is, after

40 ‘Painting’ is incorrect, as the smith-god Hephaestus does not paint the shield, but forges and decorates it (shieldmaking was throughout the whole of antiquity a normal branch of the weapons industry), but that is not important, as Hephaestus is here drawn as an ideal figure of the artist in the process of creation—a variant of the indirect self-depiction by the poet of the *Iliad*; see on this, above all, Walter Marg: *Homer über die Dichtung. Der Schild des Achilleus*. In: Joachim Latacz (ed.): *Homer. Die Dichtung und ihre Deutung*. Darmstadt 1991, 200–226, and now: Marina Coray in: BK, *Commentary to Ilias*, Book 18 (2015), 187–200.

41 That “the circular forms, complete in themselves [are] not symmetrical” and through the coloring an “elliptically distended circle” with orientation towards the right is created (Langenberg 1998, 177, transl.), is—at least in the reproduction in Bastian—not apparent. The diameter, at least, is of equal length horizontally and vertically.

all, a part of human life too. But overall, the idea of a calm, lively, well ordered, rounded, indeed ‘normal’ human world is probably the core message of this virtual artwork.⁴² One may assume that this is the reason why Twombly set the Shield, in particular, at the start of the cycle.⁴³ It conveys cosmic peace.

Immediately after this, the disruption begins. The second picture still seems relatively harmless: *Heroes of the Achaeans*. However, anyone who knows Homer, and in particular the *Iliad*, knows: ‘Achaeans’—that means war! And already in the third piece the force of a vast attack breaks in: *Vengeance of Achilles*. After that the horror will increase in bounds. But first back to the second piece.

NO. 2: HEROES OF THE ACHAEANS

We enter the display space and are given as the first part of the cycle, to the left, a list of *dramatis personae* (ill. 8);⁴⁴ what will follow is indeed a ‘drama’.⁴⁵ None of our manuscripts present any such list for the *Iliad* ahead of line 1 (the earliest manuscript is from the ninth century). As the name implies, these catalogs of characters first appear in connection with Attic *drama* and theater practice (starting in the late sixth century BC). How Twombly came up with the idea of such an introductory list of heroes is immediately obvious, however, as soon as one recalls the ‘hint for readers’ of the cycle that was mentioned above: “The painting *follows* and reflects incidents of *Homer’s Iliad ...*” Already in the opening part of the *Iliad* (2.494–759), in the so-called Catalogue of Ships, Homer gives an

⁴² Cf. *ibid.*, 177 (transl.): “universality of a closed image of the world”. On the other hand, that Twombly’s ‘Shield’ goes beyond this and “the cyclical ‘universal’ movement of the shield and through the directionality [presents an image of] the forward-driving force of Achilles”, is not apparent to me. What I instead clearly see and regard as significant is the strong portion of red inside the circle. Throughout the whole cycle, red will mark *Achilles*. That is evidently being prepared for here.

⁴³ Additional comments on this below, under ‘The Intention’.

⁴⁴ This type of ‘theatre bill’ had developed at latest in the Peripatos (Dicaearchus, 4th century BC), as a short introduction preceding the texts of the dramas, and was systematized in the Alexandrian ‘Mouseion’ (μουσεῖον) (Aristophanes of Byzantium); its two main components were the *Hypóthesis*, ‘summary’, and the list of characters (Τα τοῦ δράματος πρόσωπα, ‘The action’s characters’).

⁴⁵ Cf. HB IV, p. 28: “In a series of *scenic* explosions the ten pictures constitute a sequential analogy to the crucial events of fifty decisive days...” (etc.; emphasis: JL).



8 Cy Twombly: *Fifty Days at Iliam*, 1978, Part II: *Heroes of the Achaeans*, oil paint (paint stick), lead pencil on canvas, 191.8 × 149.9 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art, gift (by exchange) of Samuel S. White 3rd and Vera White, 1989-90-2

overview of the most important ‘leaders’ (ἡγεμόνες, *hēgemónes*) and ‘lords’ (κοίρανοι, *koiranoi*) of the ‘Danaans’ (2.487; ‘Danaan’ is another term for the ‘Achaeans’), and in the following Book 3 (161–244), in the ‘Teichoscopia’ (the view from Troy’s ramparts down to the Achaean troops who are arrayed upon the plain ready to attack: ‘watching from the walls’), this is followed by another, separate presentation of the three ‘heroes’ Agamemnon, Odysseus, and Ajax. To that extent, then, Twombly is ‘following’ Homer,⁴⁶ and this readiness to follow indicates already that “this cycle (would come) closest to the concept of the ‘pictorial narrative’”.⁴⁷ On the other hand, Twombly has not followed Homer with regard to the sequence or number of the names.⁴⁸ He makes a selection. And his selection shows that he had read Pope/Homer carefully. In the middle, extra-large and in frightening red, is the designation of one of the warring sides: ‘ACHAEANS’. This divides the list in two. These are the two levels of the Homeric narrative:

Above is the level of the *gods*: at left, THETIS, the mother of Achilles, who first set the military actions in motion through her request to Zeus for her son (1.495–530: ‘Thetis’ Request’); HERA, Zeus’s consort, who has stood implacably on the side of the Achaeans ever since the Trojan prince Paris awarded the prize for beauty not to her but to the hated Aphrodite (24.25–30: ‘Judgement of Paris’); ATHENA, who was likewise spurned by Paris when he awarded the prize for beauty, and is now giving uncompromising support to Zeus’s anti-Trojan plan; at right POSE(I)DON, the god of the sea, who holds an eternal grudge against the Trojans because they once cheated him (21.441–457 and often); HERMES, the obedient messenger of Zeus; and finally HEPHAESTUS, the legitimate son of Hera and Zeus, and the creative artist among all the gods. The one missing is Zeus (in Pope, for metrical reasons, called not ‘Jupiter’ but always ‘Jove’). Twombly evidently saw clearly that Zeus sits enthroned *above* the two sides, and he even quickly switches sides.

Below is the level of the *humans*: First CALCHAS, the seer, who had once in Aulis given decisive support to the Achaeans’ venture, through

46 Thus also Langenberg 1998, 177 (in the “third book”, however, contrary to her statement the “army and fleets” are *not* “counted out” any more).

47 Langenberg 1998, 176, transl.: “(that) this cycle (will come) closest to the concept of the ‘picture-story’”. See also Temkin 2000, op. cit., 133: “Twombly stipulated the spatial configuration of the ten large canvases in a presentation that was sequential as well as logical thematically.”

48 See the table in BK II, op. cit., 2, 146 (Edzard Visser).—In the ‘Catalogue of Ships’, 45 ‘heroes’ are named.

his interpretation of an oracle that Troy would fall in the tenth year (2.299–332). Next, the name that originally followed CALCHAS has been wiped away again by Twombly after writing it, but from the length of the smear—from the start with A, which can be guessed at the left (cf. the initial A of ‘Agamemnon’ on No. 4) to the clear final letter N at the right, the right stroke of which runs confidently up above the virtual line-space (as in the final N of PAN [1975], or CORYDON in *Thyrsis* [1977; cf. p. 206, ill. 1] and in many other cases)—we can tell that here originally stood AGAMEMNON. The retrospective cancelation (in which the lower part of CALCHAS above it was removed too) is perhaps acting according to the ‘Hint to the reader’ already mentioned: “The painting *follows* [...] incidents of Homer’s *Iliad*”. Book 1 of the *Iliad* begins with a programmatic debate between Achilles and Agamemnon (1.58–308)—programmatic in that it operates not just at the level of characters internal to the work, but also reflects upon the problems of the times, as seen by the poet of the *Iliad* externally to the work. In this debate the seer CALCHAS un-masks Agamemnon as the one to blame for the plague that threatens the existence of the Achaeans in their camp (1.68–83). In the fierce exchange of words between Agamemnon and Achilles that follows, Agamemnon remains the victor, but only outwardly, thanks to his position of power. The true victor—both morally and factually—is Achilles, who from now on will drive Agamemnon to the very edge of destruction as a general and as a man by boycotting the fighting. CALCHAS has thus, with his revelation, truly ‘wiped out’ Agamemnon as ‘hero’ and has established Achilles as the real ‘hero’ and leader. Twombly has with his brush re-enacted this development that signals the whole plot of the *Iliad*: he has first included Agamemnon in the catalog of ‘heroes’ in his formal role as leader, but then, retracing the devastating unmasking by CALCHAS, he wipes him away again and moves on to ACHILLES, the true leader and mover—both at a military and a human level. The gap left by the cancelation, of a size that cannot be overlooked, is allowed to stand by Twombly as a sign of the deletion, standing out like a shouted exclamation.

Next, and logically, almost as large and red as the ACHAEANS themselves, is ACHILLES;⁴⁹ immediately after him, but somewhat *below* him, is his friend since his youth (23.83–92), PATROCLUS; then MENEL<L>AUS, Agamemnon’s brother, King of Sparta, whose wife Helen

49 On the relation of Twombly to the figure of Achilles, see separately, below, the excursus ‘Achilles’.



9 Cy Twombly: *Fifty Days at Iliam*, 1978, Part III: *Vengeance of Achilles*, oil paint (paint stick), lead pencil, wax crayon on canvas, 299.7 × 239.4 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art, gift (by exchange) of Samuel S. White 3rd and Vera White, 1989-90-3

was abducted by the Trojan prince Paris (3.350–354 and often); further, DIOMEDES, the strong son of Tydeus, who once fell in the brave fight of the ‘Seven Against Thebes’ (4.370–374 and often); and finally TELAMONIAN AJAX, the ‘Telamonian’ (= son of Telamôn) or ‘Great Ajax’, who was the strongest in the Achaean camp *after* Achilles (2.768 f.). The only ones missing are IDOMENEUS, ruler of Crete; NESTOR, the old King of Pylos and wise counsellor; and ODYSSEUS, the intellectual and cunning diplomat. However, their absence from the list probably has little hidden significance.⁵⁰

Thus far the list of characters. For anyone who knows Homer, a unique threat!

NO. 3: VENGEANCE OF ACHILLES

The threat turns to action (ill. 9). The circling swirl that turns into a sharp red stabbing weapon leaves no doubt: the vengeance of Achilles will be merciless. Vengeance admittedly not just for the abduction of Helen—the vengeance on account of which he, like all the other leaders of the Achaeans, had originally set out for Troy to support the cuckolded Menelaus and his brother Agamemnon (1.158)—, but vengeance above all for the killing of his beloved friend Patroclus by Hector (16.818–857). That ACHILLES, before the great bloodshed begins, receives a whole piece in the cycle for himself alone shows the importance that Twombly accorded to him in relation to the action as a whole.

NO. 4: ACHAEANS IN BATTLE

ACHILLES has here been multiplied (ill. 10). Immediately under the internal title ‘AXAIOI’ (here for the first time the Greek *Chi*) at the left there appears, in a large size that makes it set the theme, the stout, powerful stabbing weapon—not without a slight allusion to the symbol of masculine force, the phallus—which cannot be entirely overlooked at the left under the name AGAMEMNON, which here now *does* appear.⁵¹ At the

50 Idomeneus, the King of *Crete*, may not have been counted by Twombly as truly one of the ‘Achaeans’; Nestor and Odysseus, the two intellectuals and diplomats, perhaps did not seem to him to fit properly in a list of warriors. However, this may just be a matter of making a selection: on the treatment of the theme 13 years earlier in *Ilium (One Morning Ten Years Later)* (1964), Odysseus does also appear, on the second part of the triptych (cf. above, ill. 3).

51 After the great quarrel in Book 1, Agamemnon fights throughout the whole *Iliad* and remains acknowledged in his formal role as leader; however he has lost his aura.



10 Cy Twombly: *Fifty Days at Iliam*, 1978, Part IV: *Achaeans in Battle*, oil paint (paint stick), wax crayon, lead pencil on canvas, 299.7 × 379.7 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art, gift (by exchange) of Samuel S. White 3rd and Vera White, 1989-90-4

right under AXAIOI this weapon sign is repeated in a smaller scale four or five times. This crowded gathering of circling whirls with their transition to a point like that of a spear or the barrel of a cannon, all pointed in the same direction at the imaginary enemy, has had many different interpretations. For the most part, the multiple, massed directionality of these swirls has been seen as concentrated violence and the fury of the attacking movement. As a general interpretation that is certainly correct. Less certain is the meaning of the individual swirls. Usually they are seen (leaving aside 'carrots', 'rockets', and similar) as 'war chariots' (which stand for the 'heroes').⁵² That is certainly right in the case of the painting done 13 years previously, *Ilium (One Morning Ten Years Later)*: Leeman has correctly pointed out⁵³ that the interpretation in this earlier case is unambiguous: "... a circle divided diametrically by two, three or four strokes to form four, six, or eight segments, the usual schematic representation of a wheel."⁵⁴ However, this 'wheel-spoke representation'⁵⁵ is no longer found at all in this part of our cycle (aside from one uncertain hint below AJAX), nor later in Part 8, *Ilians in Battle*. This does not exclude that the swirl may be supposed to make us think of chariots, but if we begin from the prototype of the swirl as it appears as a single object in the previous Part 3, which is merely multiplied in Part 4, another, more dynamic explanation suggests itself: the circling swirl that in *Vengeance of Achilles* turns from large circles into ever smaller circles seems to want to express the phase of charging up strength, the preparatory self-dynamization and gathering of energy, which at its climax pushes for and ultimately leads to discharge and transformation into aggressive action. Comparable perhaps, with an eye to the world of athletics today, is the hammer thrower, who turns around with the hammer in ever faster and smaller circles, and thus charges himself with energy, until finally the gathered charge discharges

52 The light, two-wheeled war chariot with a chariot-box for charioteer and lance-thrower is in fact a frequent and notable technical auxiliary weapon in the *Iliad*, but it is used less as a 'battle tank' than as a transport vehicle, see Joachim Latacz: *Kampfparänese, Kampfdarstellung und Kampfwirklichkeit in der Ilias, bei Kallinos und Tyrtaios* (Zetemata 66). Munich 1977, 215–223: during the battles, the vehicle belongs primarily not in the phase of attack but in the retreat phase. However, Twombly would not have been able to find anything about this in Pope's presentation of the chariots (in Mack in: Butt, vol. 7, 258).

53 Leeman 2004, 69, transl.; cf. 90.

54 More on the wheel as symbol *ibid.*, 218 f.

55 See for this also *Untitled* (1981–83, recto) *ibid.*, 219.

energy, with the exhalation of breath and a wild cry, via the throw and on out to the target. (The phallus analogy would in this interpretation *mutatis mutandis* naturally also remain valid as a subtext.)

Between the attack-swirls stand the *names* of the agents. Twombly has evidently read very carefully the four, sometimes overlong, battle descriptions⁵⁶ in the *Iliad* (here Pope's accompanying *Essay on Homer's Battels*⁵⁷ was surely a help in understanding them). From *above*, just as in Homer,⁵⁸ the *gods* intervene in the battle: at left THETIS, who is intended more as the one who *caused* the events, and of course as Achilles' mother (see above, No. 2); and ATHENA; to right, only faintly legible, VENUS (Pope—for metrical, among other reasons—once uses the Latin name 'Venus' for 'Aphrodite' in line 5.385, and also uses periphrases, such as 'The Queen of Love', 'The Cyprian Queen', and others); and right at the bottom the aggressive triangular wedge of violence continues under the divine name HERA. Between them, again, the *human* names, the Achaeans: at top right, hard to read, DIOMEDES; in the center of course ACHILLES; to left below him AGAMEMNON; and at right, at almost the same level, AJAX; finally right at the bottom, to right, barely decipherable CYCNUS—which, however, has been wiped away again, probably because Twombly later noticed that Cynus only appears in post-Homeric epic (in the 'Cypria'⁵⁹), and does so on the side of the *Trojans*.⁶⁰

56 See the graphic in: BK, *Prolegomena*, op. cit., 152 (Engl. ed. 159).

57 Mack in: Butt, op. cit., vol. 7, 252–262.

58 Many interpreters are not aware that the action of the *Iliad* plays out on *two* levels, which constantly communicate and interact with each other by complex means: the level of the gods, which is always the upper one (matching human ideas of the divine since primitive times), and the level of the humans, which is always the lower one. The gods always attack from above (ὑψοθεν, *hypso-then*, from high up [e.g. 11.53], or οὐρανόθεν, *uranó-then*, from heaven [e.g. 1.195]) into the human world. For Twombly this is entirely self-evident, as his arrangement throughout shows.

59 The 'Cypria' tell the events of Trojan history *before* the events of the *Iliad* began; more on this in Brill's New Pauly under 'Epic cycle'.

60 The temptation nonetheless to involve CYCNUS (Greek Κύκνος, Kúknos, Lat. *cygnus*, 'the swan'), may also have been influenced by Twombly's nearly magical attraction to the letter-sequence 'CY': he himself was called CY (after 'Cy-clone': his father's nickname), he named his son 'Cy-rus (after the Persian king Cyrus) Alessandro', and his compositions frequently include inscribed names such as CY-CLOPS, CY-PRIS etc.; see New York 1994, 10, and Leeman 2004, 292.

Below the whole picture of furious aggression is a swirl that is hard to interpret and almost wiped away, the red point of which seems to be almost shamefully turning away and backwards; above this, ARTIST.⁶¹ Does Twombly want to deny the violence for himself?

NO. 5: *THE FIRE THAT CONSUMES ALL BEFORE IT*

Here we see the *effect* of violence (ill. 11). Beneath the fiery red cloud of destruction, which merges into black and is pressed into itself but then gradually comes to a point, Twombly writes: "Like a fire that consumes all before it." By this he is directly citing Pope: in Book 2, line 780, Homer describes the advance of the Achaean host against Troy as follows:

οἱ δ' ἄρ' ἴσαν ὥς εἴ τε πυρὶ χθὼν πᾶσα νέμοιτο ...

But they went forth as if the whole earth were being grazed up by fire

Pope gives this in his *Preface* to the translation as a characterization of *Homer's* captivating style⁶² already on the second page as

"They pour along like a Fire that sweeps the whole Earth before it"⁶³

and at another point in the preface he says of Homer and Achilles:

"*Homer*, boundless and irresistible as *Achilles*, bears all before him."⁶⁴

With that, we have the highest possible form of reference by an artist to his model: the (almost) word-for-word quotation.

NO. 6: *Shades of Achilles, Patroclus and Hector*

This piece seems not to fit the framework that has been discussed so far. We shall pass over it at this point and come back to it at the end (ill. 12).

⁶¹ For Langenberg 1998, 178, this "war artist" with his "palette" is a "comic note".

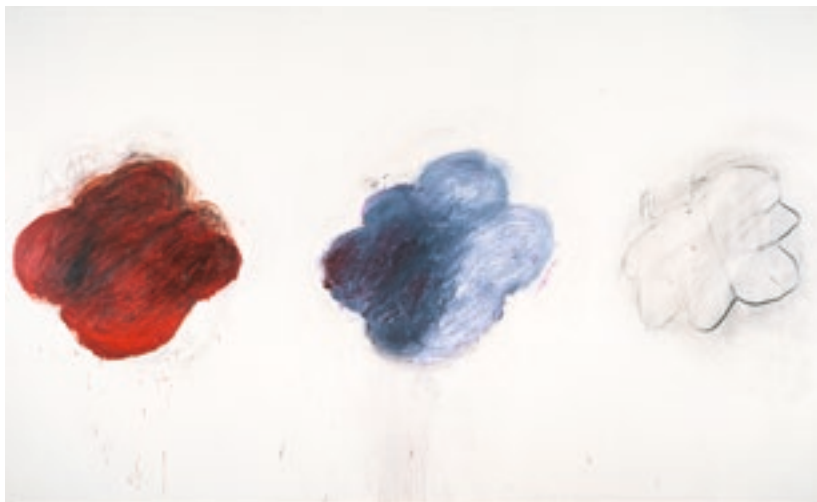
⁶² "The Course of his [= Homer's] Verses resembles that of the Army he describes" (Mack in: Butt, op. cit., vol. 7, 4).

⁶³ Mack *ibid.*, vol. 7, p. XX.—Recognized already by Heiner Bastian in: HB IV, 24, n. 4.

⁶⁴ Pope, *Preface*, p. 12 (in Mack *ibid.*, vol. 7, p. XX; in the German translation of Pope: *Sämtliche Werke*, 12. vol., Mannheim 1781, 242: "*Homer, uneingeschränkt und unwiderstehlich wie Achilles, räumt alles vor sich aus dem Wege*" [emphasis: J.L.].



11 Cy Twombly: *Fifty Days at Iliam*, 1978, Part V: *The Fire That Consumes All Before It*, oil paint, wax crayon on canvas, 300 × 192 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art, gift (by exchange) of Samuel S. White 3rd and Vera White, 1989-90-5

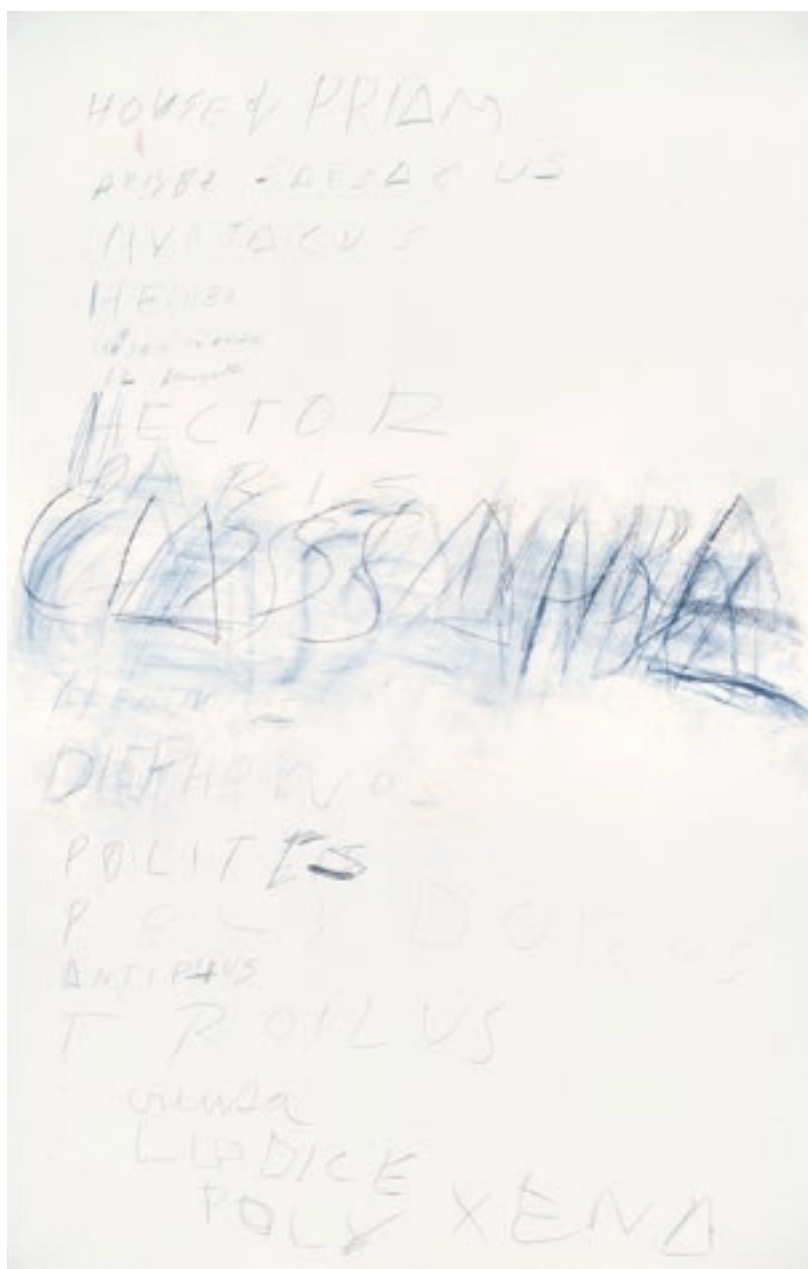


12 Cy Twombly: *Fifty Days at Iliam*, 1978, Part VI: *Shades of Achilles, Patroclus and Hector*, oil paint, wax crayon, lead pencil on canvas, 299.7 × 491.5 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art, gift (by exchange) of Samuel S. White 3rd and Vera White, 1989-90-6

NO. 7: *House of Priam*

Here Twombly presents the core group of those against whom the Achaeans' assault was directed (ill. 13). The 'House of Priam', i.e. Troy's ruling family under the aged King Priam (the term 'house' here does not refer to a building, but translates the Greek οἶκος, *oikos*, a 'ruling house')—this family, then, is represented by 15 names, of which 10 are male and 5 female. The sequence of the names is opaque. At the start it looks like a roughly alphabetical order, but this ends with CASSANDRA. Nor is any system at first detectable in their significance. ARISBE, which begins the series, seems at first to be a mistake, for in the *Iliad* this name refers not to a woman but to a place on the Hellespont that was home to an important ally of the Trojans, namely Asius (2.835–839). AESACUS (in Greek Aisakos) is a Trojan seer, but he belongs to the history that preceded the Trojan War, and does not appear in the *Iliad* at all.⁶⁵ Here too at first a mistake seems to have occurred. HYRTACUS (Greek Hyrtakos) likewise does not in the *Iliad* belong to the House of Priam; he appears only once in the *Iliad*, as the father of the Asius just mentioned, who is *not* a Trojan (2.835–839; on this see BK II 2 on line 837). What Twombly could have meant by these three names ARISBE, AESACUS, and HYRTACUS thus at first sight seems unclear. The solution to the puzzle, however, evidently lies in Twombly's very wide reading in the relevant literature: for the 'House of Priam' (and much else) Twombly has clearly also read Apollodorus' *Bibliothêkê*, a genealogical handbook, probably composed in the Roman imperial period. In that work, ARISBE is named as the *first* wife of Priam, with whom Priam had a son AESACUS (Gk. Aisakos) after whose birth, however, Priam passed ARISBE on to HYRTACUS (Gk. Hyrtakos) in order to marry Hecabe/Hecuba (Apollodorus, *Bibliothêkê* III 147).—With HECUBA (Greek Hekábê), the wife of Priam, we finally reach the Trojan royal house in the *Iliad* itself. Under her name Twombly has scribbled: "50 sons by Hecabe / 12 Daughters". Here it is clear which passage is being alluded to: it is Book 6 of the *Iliad*, lines 244–250, where Priam's palace is sketched, with mention of the 50 bedchambers of the sons of Priam and 12 bedchambers of the daughters of Priam. HECTOR is the name of Priam's favorite son and commander of the army defending Troy, PARIS is the handsome, artistic brother of Hector, the abductor of Helen (3.38–76). Twombly must have been exceptionally impressed by the next character,

⁶⁵ See the next note.



13 Cy Twombly: *Fifty Days at Iliam, 1978, Part VII: House of Priam*, lead pencil, oil paint, charcoal on canvas, 299.7 × 192.1 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art, gift (by exchange) of Samuel S. White 3rd and Vera White, 1989-90-7

Priam's daughter CASSANDRA, as is shown by the generously proportioned script. Yet in the *Iliad* the figure of *Kassandrê* only appears twice: once in Book 24 (24.699), where she is the first to see her father Priam as he returns at dawn with Hector's corpse from the camp of the Achaeans, and once also in Book 13 (13.365), where she appears as the bride of a certain Othryonêus, and is called the "best-looking of Priam's daughter" (and similarly in the other passage, where she is said to be "like golden Aphrodite"). The exceptional importance that Twombly grants her here has probably been drawn from her associations in Attic tragedy, especially Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (performed as part of the *Oresteia* trilogy in 458 BC)—in a sense, a prognosis for the future fate of this seer of the future, on the basis of the poem's future reception. In the *Iliad* the next names are all—apart from HELENUS (Helenos), the most important counsellor of Hector (6.76, 7.43–55)—less important sons and daughters of Priam (DEÏPHOBUS, POLYDORUS, LAODICE,⁶⁶ POLYXENA⁶⁷), in which Twombly also here and there misspells the names. Between TROILUS and LAODICE appears (in lower-case letters) a *Creusa* (Krêusa), who has nothing to do with the *Iliad*; that she was a daughter of Priam will have been an old tradition,⁶⁸ but we first learn of her in Virgil.⁶⁹

66 For the passages where they appear in the *Iliad*, see in BK, Prolegomena, op. cit., 'Figuren-Index', 173–407 (Engl. ed.: 'Character Index', 204–235).

67 Polyxena does not appear in the *Iliad*. After the conquest of Troy she was sacrificed at the tomb of Achilles: see the summary of the content of the post-Homeric epic 'Iliupersis' by Proclus (in *Poetae Epici Graeci. Testimonia et Fragmenta*. Pars I, ed. Albertus Bernabé, Stuttgartiae et Lipsiae MCMXCVI, 89), as depicted in drama in Euripides' *Trojan Women* (see Joachim Latacz: *Einführung in die griechische Tragödie*. Göttingen 2003, 333–338). It is highly likely that she too was known to Twombly from Apollodorus (III 151), see next note.

68 In Apollodorus III 151—perhaps via Robert Graves' *The Greek Myths* of 1955 (see the contribution by Thierry Greub in the present volume)—Hecuba's daughters are listed as *Krêusa*, *Laodike*, *Polyxene* and *Kas[sic]andra*, Hecuba's sons as *Deïphobos*, *Helenos*, *Pammon*, *Polites*, *Antiphos*, *Hipponoos*, *Polydoros* and *Troilos*. The wide agreement with Twombly's list (cf. also the names on No. 9!) is obvious. Coincidence seems to be ruled out. Apollodorus' mythographical handbook had been widely known since the *editio princeps* by Aegius, Rome 1555, and was much used from the Renaissance onwards. Twombly could have read the book in the parallel (Greek–English) edition by Sir James George Frazer in the 'Loeb Classical Library' (two-volume edition, 1921).

69 Virgil, *Aeneid*, 2.768–794 and frequently, where she is the first wife of Aeneas and mother of Ascanius; she disappeared during Aeneas' [Aineias'] flight from

All in all, Twombly seems to have taken a less intense interest in the Trojans than in the Achaeans. That is shown also by the omissions: Hector's wife Andromache, for example, is missing, as is Astyanax, the couple's young son, and Helen, who too now dwells in the 'House of Priam', is also not mentioned. The 'House of Priam' is after all the victim, the trophy, and—the losers. The future prizes the victors.

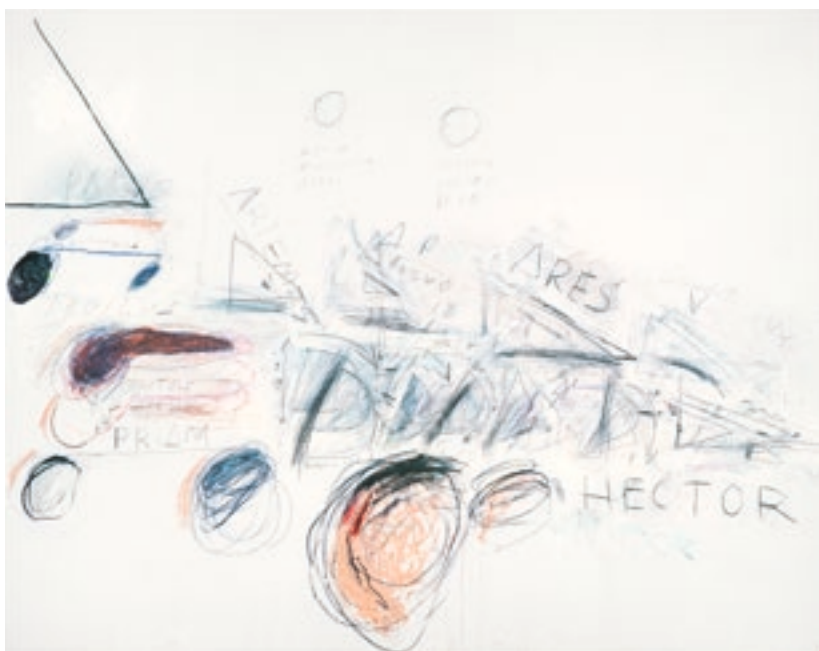
NO. 8: *ILIANS IN BATTLE*

'Ilians'⁷⁰ in Battle' is clearly the counterpart to No. 4, 'Achaeans in Battle'; in its whole design it presents a kind of mirror-image of 'ACHAEANS IN BATTLE' (ill. 14). Here as there, we have the division between the upper part, the world of the gods, and the lower part, the human world. However: Whereas in 'ACHAEANS IN BATTLE' the center and at the same time the dividing line between the two spheres was formed by the name ACHILLES (Achilles is after all the son of a goddess, and as such stands *between* the two spheres), here we evidently have no individual name, but a confusion of letters that is barely decipherable with certainty on the reproduction. From the three⁷¹ first, strongly scored blue verticals we may suspect, however, as a comparison with ILIANS in No. 10 shows, the start of ILI(ANS). This suspicion could only be confirmed on the (3 m high) original, however. Why Twombly evidently did not finish this (supposed) correspondence to ACHAEANS in No. 4, and then wiped away again the whole area that was probably originally planned for it, must remain open (a cancelation, as with A[GAMEMNO]N in No. 2, as a *vaticinium* of the vanity of their efforts?); whether the notation highlighted by the double arrow (and some indecipherable small signs and numbers [expressing the 'line width' in centimeters?]) before the initial I is connected to this, likewise remains unknown.

the burning Troy. Twombly, a great admirer also of Virgil, combined Homer with Virgil more than once.

70 It is not clear how Twombly came to use the designation 'Ilians' for the Trojans. He cannot have got it from Pope, who (apart from periphrases) always speaks exclusively of the *Trojans* (Τρῳες, thus always in Homer). Nor is this form attested in modern English, so far as I can see. One may perhaps think of it as an independent coinage by Twombly modeled on the (rare) *Ilii* in Latin (if it is not simply derived from 'Ilium'). [—Ed. note: Twombly knew it from Robert Graves' *The Greek Myths*, cf. n. 68].

71 The second vertical is hard to see in the volume of reproductions (HB Iliam, unpaginated); it is clearer in Leeman 2004, 74–75.



14 Cy Twombly: *Fifty Days at Iliam*, 1978, Part VIII: *Ilians in Battle*, oil paint (paint stick), wax crayon, lead pencil on canvas, 299.7 × 379.7 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art, gift (by exchange) of Samuel S. White 3rd and Vera White, 1989-90-8

The names are divided, as in No. 4, into divine names above and human names below. At the very top, to left, beneath the first 'cloud', written in thin lead pencil beneath it (a kind of pre-catalog), is again the gods' level: APOLLO, patron deity of the Trojans (1.37; 5, 446); APHRODITE, and ARES, the God of War, who in the *Iliad* is on the side of the Trojans; to the right of this, beneath a second 'cloud', in the same kind of script, ARTEMIS, who, as the sister of Apollo and daughter of Leto, is likewise a patron deity of Troy; XANTHUS (see below); and LETO. And in fact all these gods are on the Trojans' side in the *Iliad*. Below this, in a sense in a second 'row', the 'catalog' is transformed into the dynamic of divine intervention. Once again the violence of the gods intervening in support erupts in the form of the (relatively) huge triangular wedge familiar from No. 4 into the human world: from left to right ARTEMIS, APOLLO, ARES, (Aphrodite, in cursive script, crossed out, and instead below it:) VENUS. Beneath VENUS—under whom there is an over-painted, now illegible name—there is another downward-pointing triangular wedge, the inscription upon which is likewise not identifiable in the reproductions. If we put the gods' names together—APOLLO, APHRODITE/Venus and ARES, ARTEMIS, LETO, and above all XANTHUS (Xanthos: in the *Iliad* another name for Troy's main river and rivergod, the Scamander: 20.74)—then the conclusion imposes itself that Twombly has here taken inspiration from Book 21 of the *Iliad*, the battle of the gods and the river.⁷²

However, the human names lead us to a different interpretation. As with 'House of Priam', they have again been collected in a rather hasty and associative way. At the far left, at the edge, we begin with a giant triangular wedge in which PAR-IS has been inscribed and then shaded over, Paris who fought reluctantly, and then usually only under compulsion (e.g. 3.30–76; he does not appear at all in Book 21); then ANTIPHUS (Antiphos), whom Agamemnon had killed already in Book 11 (line 101 f.); TROILUS (Trôilos), who at the time of the action of the *Iliad* was not even alive any more (24.257); POLITES, whose last appearance as a warrior was in Book 15 (line 339), and appears again as a son of Priam only in 24.250;⁷³ and finally PRIAM (Priamos), the aged king who in any case does not join the fighting in *any* of the four battles of the *Iliad*. On the other hand HECTOR deserved a more prominent position in the 'Battle', especially if the composition is taking Book 21 as its reference point (cf.

⁷² See on this the detailed account of the contents of all 24 books in Joachim Latacz: *Homer. His Art and His World*. Ann Arbor, 1996 ff., 108–11.

⁷³ But cf. n. 68.



15 Cy Twombly: *Fifty Days at Iliam*, 1978, Part IX: *Shades of Eternal Night*, oil paint, charcoal, turpentine, wax crayon on canvas, 300 × 239 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art, gift (by exchange) of Samuel S. White 3rd and Vera White, 1989-90-9



16 Cy Twombly: *Fifty Days at Iliam*, 1978, Part X: *Heroes of the Ilians*, oil paint (paint stick), wax crayon, lead pencil on canvas, 161.9 × 149.9 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art, gift (by exchange) of Samuel S. White 3rd and Vera White, 1989-90-10

e.g. 21.279, where Achilles calls him the ‘best of the Trojans’ [ἄριστος, *áristos*]). About the allusive representations of aggression beneath the human names—the ‘speartips’ or ‘rockets’ or even ‘hammers’—nothing more need be said here. Two of the familiar swirls are here often interpreted as chariot wheels (the hints of chariots below ANTIPHUS and PRIAM seem to support that); yet it seems this interpretation need not be the only possible or exclusively valid one.⁷⁴

We may conclude that Twombly’s point of reference in the case of the ‘Battles’ was not a single, identifiable ‘battle’ of the *Iliad*, but slaughter and fighting in a very general sense, once on the side of the Achaeans (No. 4), once on the side of the Trojans (No. 8).

NO. 9: *Shades of Eternal Night*

This piece will be discussed at the end, together with No. 6 (ill. 15).

NO. 10: *HEROES OF THE ILIANS*

Once again a companion piece, this time to No. 2 ‘Heroes of the Achaeans’. However, the list (catalog) of these Trojan ‘heroes’ comprises not twelve names, as we would expect from No. 7, but only seven, or at most nine (ill. 16). Right at the top, painted over with white and very hard to decipher, perhaps APOLLO and APHRODITE.⁷⁵ There follows, written across the top ILIANS (in blue, while in contrast in the corresponding piece ACHAEANS is in red!). After this, the individualization: in first place HECTOR (Hektor)—that is self-evident (if we leave out Priam). Then PARIS, and rightly so, as he is the one who provoked the war; AENEAS (Aineias), the remote cousin of Priam from a different branch of the family and later the mythical founder of Rome (20.213–241); HEL[L]ENUS, the seer (see under No. 7); ANTENOR, the Trojan ‘senator’, who in vain advises seeking a peace (3.148, 7.347–353); and finally—rather astonishingly—DOLON and RHESUS, both of whom appear only in the ‘night raid’ in Book 10, Dolon as a Trojan spy (10.314–327), Rhesus as leader of

⁷⁴ See on this the different interpretation proposed at No. 4; Langenberg 1998 does not even mention it; she sees throughout only “phallus forms” (178).

⁷⁵ Proposal by Thierry Greub (by email). Previously deciphered in the same way by Langenberg 1998, 180.—The human names below ILIANS are over-‘written’ extra-large with the death-sign of the rosette (see n. 93)—a kind of R.I.P (= *Requiescat in pace*). It cannot be ruled out that Twombly may have subsequently repainted in white again the divine names above: the gods are immortal (ἀθάνατοι).

a troop from Thrace that had come to Troy's aid (10.434 f.).⁷⁶ Among the Trojan 'heroes' the selection was in fact rather limited.⁷⁷ Twombly's compilation attests, in that light, his quite astonishingly precise reading of the *Iliad*.

EXCURSUS: ACHILLES

ACHILLES (griech. Ἀχιλλεύς, *Achilléus*) appears on the individual pieces the most frequently: on 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6—and always in an emphasized position. For a professional Homer scholar this leading position is self-evident. And a non-professional may of course notice this, although in non-specialist circles the view still dominates that the *Iliad* is the story of the Trojan War (which, notoriously, it is *not*).⁷⁸ Twombly has certainly read the *Iliad* in Pope's translation more carefully than any amateur. Nonetheless: Why ACHILLES?

The trigger was probably given, again, by Pope. Let us compare two translations of the first line of the *Iliad*:

Iliad prooemium, line 1:

Μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεά, Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος

Murray/Wyatt 1999:

The wrath sing, goddess, of Peleus' son Achilles.

Latacz 2000.³2009:

Den Groll singe, Göttin, des Peleïaden Achilleus!

⁷⁶ Twombly could not have known that the whole of Book 10 of the *Iliad*, a 'night adventure', is a post-Homeric addition.

⁷⁷ Cf. BK, Prolegomena, op. cit., ch. 6b: 'Zum Figurenbestand der Ilias: Menschen [FM]': 3. Troia, 139–141 (English ed.: p. 146 ff.).

⁷⁸ Even Pope, at the start of his 'Poetical Index to Homer's *Iliad*' (in Mack in: Butt, op. cit., vol. 7, 591), had seen the theme of the *Iliad* as something else: "The great Moral of the *Iliad*: that Concord, among Governours, is the preservation of States, and Discord the ruin of them: pursued through the whole Fable. The Anger of Achilles breaks this Union in the opening of the Poem". If one, like Pope, attends to the 'moral of history', then certainly it is quite correct to identify this as an important, latent sociopolitical secondary theme of the *Iliad*, see Joachim Latacz: *Troia und Homer*. Leipzig 2010, 245–248, and Latacz 2001. The real, primary theme, however, is the 'wrath of Achilles', see below n. 83.

To the contrary, Pope 1715:

Achilles' Wrath, to Greece the direful Spring
Of Woes unnumber'd, heav'nly Goddess, sing!

It is only in Pope that the first word is 'Achilles' (with an inset initial at the height of three lines: 'A', ill. 17).⁷⁹ And it is Pope, too, who praises Achilles to the skies in his 'introduction'. For him, Achilles is not just the main character of the *Iliad*, but also the ideal aristocratic man.⁸⁰ Twombly has adopted that. As is shown already by the works preparatory to the cycle—above all *Achilles Mourning the Death of Patroclus*⁸¹—Achilles is for Twombly not a butcher, but a very subtle, very sensitive man, though one who is also uncompromising and capable of great emotions, including negative ones (*Vengeance of Achilles*). He is the true victor over Troy. Twombly views the events before and around Ilion/Ilium through

79 On this see below, n. 82.

80 "There ist something very noble in these Sentiments of *Achilles* [...] the Poet on all Occasions admirably sustains the Character of *Achilles* [...] *Achilles* is as much a Hero when he weeps, as when he fights [...] he is a terrible Enemy, but an amiable Friend": Pope, n. on *Iliad* 24.14, in part cited by Mack in: Butt, op. cit., vol. 7, p. CLXV.

81 What Leeman 2004, 79, says about this composition uses a great many words while missing the point (cf. also the following n.), and leads to the extraordinary closing sentence, "Bearing in mind this poetic function of the title, Twombly's tableau shows not so much 'Achilles mourning' as the grief of Achilles itself (*Iliad* 18)." (transl.). Grief is indicated, that is correct, but not in general as in Book 18; rather, it is in fact 'shown', in its specific manifestation at a very particular, different passage of the *Iliad*: at the start of Book 23, Achilles sees the 'soul' (ψυχή, *psychê*, properly 'breath') of Patroclus, which reminds the sleeper of the many things the two of them had shared in common, and asks Achilles for a shared tomb. Achilles at once assents (23.96), but asks 'Patroclus' to come closer, so that they could at least once more embrace weeping (23.97 f.). Then: "So saying he reached out with his hands, yet clasped him not; but the spirit like smoke was gone beneath the earth, squeaking." [or: creaking (like a door), or cheeping (like a bird), but hardly 'twittering'; the onomatopoetic significance of the Greek verb (the noise made when it flies away) can hardly be represented in English] (Transl. Murray/Wyatt, slightly altered). Twombly read this in Pope as follows: "He said, and with his longing Arms essay'd / in vain to grasp the visionary Shade; / Like a thin Smoke he sees the Spirit fly, / and hears a feeble, lamentable Cry." In Twombly's presentation the beseeching outstretched arms and the vanity of their effort to reach out for the vanishing 'smoke' can be felt palpably and emotionally.

ACHILLES' Wrath, to Greece the direful Spring
 Of Woes unnumber'd, heav'nly Goddess, sing!
 That Wrath which hurl'd to *Pluto's* gloomy Reign
 The Souls of mighty Chiefs untimely slain;
 Whose Limbs unbury'd on the naked Shore

5

1 Achilles' . . . Greece] The Wrath of *Peleus'* Son 1715-32.

2 Of . . . heav'nly] Of all the *Grecian* Woes, O 1715-32.

It is something strange that of all the Commentators upon *Homer*, there is hardly one whose principal Design is to illustrate the Poetical Beauties of the Author. They are Voluminous in explaining those Sciences which he made but subservient to his Poetry, and sparing only upon that Art which constitutes his Character. This has been occasion'd by the Ostentation of Men who had more Reading than Taste, and were fonder of showing their Variety of Learning in all Kinds, than their single Understanding in Poetry. Hence it comes to pass that their Remarks are rather Philosophical, Historical, Geographical, Allegorical, or in short rather any thing than Critical and Poetical. Even the Grammarians, tho' their whole Business and Use be only to render the Words of an Author intelligible, are strangely touch'd with the Pride of doing something more than they ought. The grand Ambition of one sort of Scholars is to encrease the Number of *Various Lectures*; which they have done to such a degree of obscure Diligence, that (as Sir *H. Savil* observ'd)¹ we now begin to value the first Editions of Books as most correct, because they have been least corrected. The prevailing Passion of others is to discover *New Meanings* in an Author, whom they will cause to appear mysterious purely for the Vanity of being thought to unravel him. These account it a disgrace to be of the Opinion of those that preceded them; and it is generally the Fate of such People who will never say what was said before, to say what will never be said after them. If they can but find a Word that has once been strain'd by some dark Writer to signify any thing different from its usual Acceptation, it is frequent with them to apply it constantly to that uncommon Meaning, whenever they meet it in a clear Writer: For Reading is so much dearer to them than Sense, that they will discard it at any time to make way for a Criticism. In other Places where they cannot contest the Truth of the common Interpretation, they get themselves room for Dissertation by imaginary *Amphibologies*, which they will have to be design'd by the Author. This Disposition of finding out different Significations in one thing, may be the Effect of either too much, or too little Wit: For Men of a right Understanding generally see at once all that an Author can reasonably mean, but others are apt to fancy Two Meanings for want of knowing One. Not to add, that there is a vast deal of difference between the Learning of a Critick, and the Puzzling of a Grammarian.

It is no easy Task to make something out of a hundred Pedants that is not Pedantical; yet this he must do, who would give a tolerable Abstract of the

his eyes.⁸² Thus, ultimately, Twombly correctly understood the *Iliad*, as present-day research on Homer shows it: for Homer it is about Achilles.⁸³

VI THE INTENTION

Finally the question: Does Twombly's Troy cycle intend a deeper message than a simple narration? And if so, what might it be?

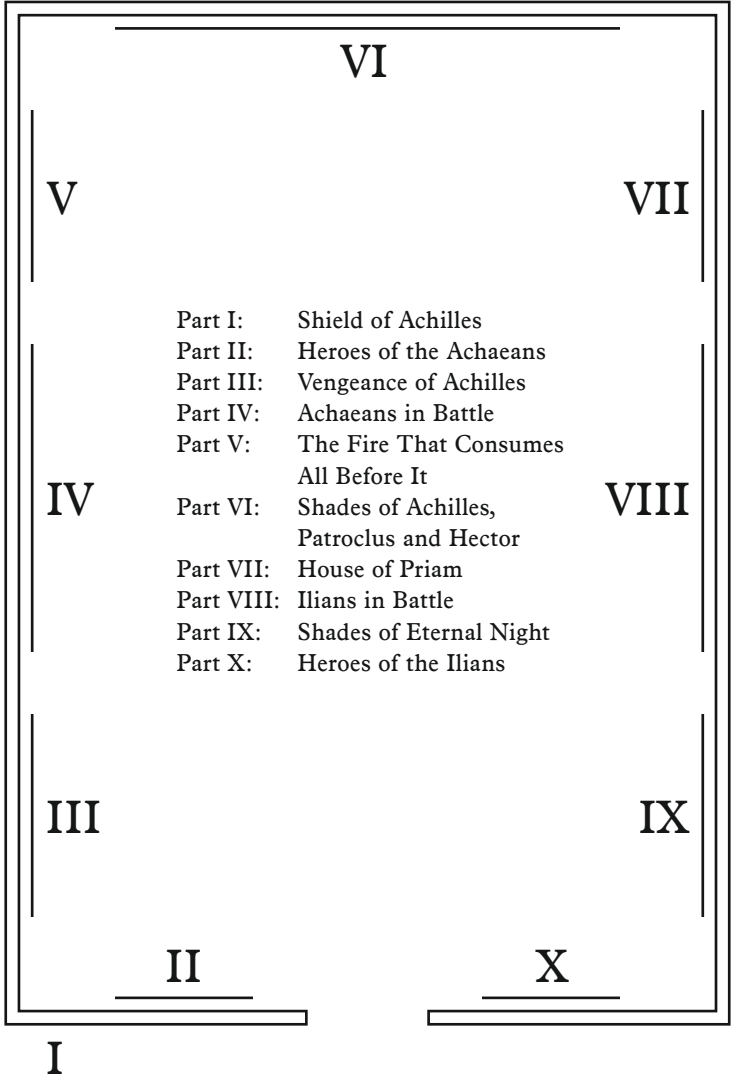
82 This is also Twombly's explanation, which at first seems whimsical, in answer to the question of why he wrote in the title of the cycle *IliAm* rather than the correct *IliUm*, namely "to refer to Achilles" (according to Kennedy 2011, op. cit.), because the name 'Achilles' begins with A! Achilles dominated Twombly's entire reception of the *Iliad*. Leeman's (2004, 293, transl.), cryptic allusion "... and the feminization of the city of Ilion [...] is not entirely innocent" (after he had previously spoken of Twombly's "negligence", of freedom or indifference as regards the spelling") goes off in the wrong direction: there cannot be "negligence", "freedom or indifference as regards the spelling" here, because this is not about spelling, but about knowledge of Latin, and if it is "not entirely innocent" then this excludes "negligence". As his *Ilium (One Morning Ten Years Later)* of 1964 demonstrates, Twombly was very probably familiar with the correct placename. The 'A' also cannot have anything to do with "feminization", because feminization would here not yield any kind of deeper sense (Ilia, according to an old version of the saga, was the daughter of Aeneas and mother of Romulus und Remus: what would it mean, in relation to the cycle, to call it "Fifty Days at the Mother of Romulus and Remus"?). Thierry Greub correctly points out that Twombly's 1962 composition *Vengeance of Achilles* (cf. p. 141, ill. 4) presents a form of the 'A' that is like the point of a spear (Thierry Greub: *Nähe und Ferne zu Homer. Die künstlerische Rezeption Homers in der Neuzeit*. In: *Homer. Der Mythos von Troia in Dichtung und Kunst* (Ausst.-Kat. Wiss. Begleitband zur Homer-Ausstellung Antikenmuseum Basel / Reiss-Engelhorn-Museen Mannheim), ed. by Joachim Latacz, Thierry Greub, Peter Blome and Alfred Wiczorek. Munich 2008, 273). Twombly's explanation of his way of writing the last word in the cycle's title is therefore (by a very roundabout route) within the overall context of his reception of Achilles, entirely comprehensible. Varnedoe in: Berlin 1994, who across 65 pages stubbornly writes "... at IliUm", is evidently seized by the idea that the artist must be tacitly corrected.

83 "That [sc. the main Story] of the *Iliad* is the *Anger of Achilles*, the most short and single Subject that ever was chosen by any Poet": Pope, Preface, 5).—Cf. Joachim Latacz: *Achilleus. Wandlungen eines europäischen Heldenbildes*. Stuttgart/Leipzig 1995, 21997 (now in: Latacz 2014, 267–346).

Let us look first into the *display space* of the cycle (cf. ill. 2.1–2.3), and consider the arrangement of the parts of the cycle in this space (see the plan on p. 184).

Even before entering the space the visitor sees the first piece, the ‘Shield’: all’s well with the world. After this he *enters* the space. He will probably walk along the walls, beginning at left with No. 2, and then walking on around the whole space to No. 10 at the right.⁸⁴ In doing so, however, he will miss the most important thing. For if he does *not* walk around the individual pieces in a linear order, but instead slowly traverses the room from the entrance towards the back wall to an imaginary central line, and at that point turns his gaze first left, then right, then he will grasp with sudden clarity the discovery: left and right correspond to each other. To left are the ACHAEANS, to right the ILIANS. That is well planned. Nothing is out of order. A clear confrontation—and a confrontation not just as a whole, but also in the individual parts. For the individual compositions stand directly opposite each other. The first pair left and right (No. 2 + No. 10) form the *dramatis personae* of the two sides of the conflict: to left the Achaeans, to right the Trojans. The second pair (No. 3 + No. 9) is less obvious: why does the ‘Vengeance of Achilles’ stand opposite the ‘Shades of Eternal Night? The explanation may perhaps be: the killers (left) and their victims (right). The dead in the underworld (‘eternal night’; cf. Sophocles *Ajax* 660: νῦξ Ἀΐδης τε, ‘Night and Hades’) are called by Homer not just *eidōla*, ‘images’ (‘idols’), but also

84 This is also the direction in which Langenberg (1998, 180, here cited in transl.) is headed. From this there necessarily arises a linear interpretation of the cycle, which sees on the left wall a presentation of “the attacking movement of the Greek army and especially of Achilles”, and on the right wall “the movements of the retreat and the stupor of defeat” (the interpretation in Temkin 2000, op. cit., 133, seems to want to go in a similar direction: “Twombly designed the installation so that the four paintings on one side of the room present a predominantly Greek mood, passionate and explosive, while the four across from them embody the Trojan character, contemplative and cool”). At least in the case of Nos 7 and 8 one certainly cannot speak of “retreat” or of a “stupor of defeat” (nor of “contemplativity” or “coolness”). Langenberg senses this herself, as she adds: “At the same time, the hanging as a whole can be understood symmetrically, especially through the placing opposite of the enemy camps, which is supported by the central ‘battle scene’, which is the largest in each case.” However, this interpretation that wants to have it both ways, a quick compromise, cannot be truly satisfying.



Plan Arrangement of *Fifty Days at Ilium* in Philadelphia Museum of Art
(Th. Greub)

skiái, 'shades'. They no longer have flesh and blood, but are grey, boneless shadows flitting about.⁸⁵ That is here the work of *Achilles*.

The third pair (No. 4 + No. 8) is clear: The battle for Troy, seen as a living confrontation between the two armies.

The fourth pair (No. 5 + No. 7) again seems rather more difficult, but the relation is ultimately clear: the 'fire that consumes all before it' has only one goal, namely the destruction of royal rule over Troy, the destruction of the 'House of Priam'.

But then the back wall: No. 6, *Shades of Achilles, Patroclus and Hector*. A single piece. Why? It has been discussed as the "central canvas of the series",⁸⁶ "the axis of symmetry" and "point of rest and symmetry";⁸⁷ "central panel of the monumental polyptych"⁸⁸ and similar terms. Formally, though not without posing problems *more geometrico*, that is certainly true. However, beyond this, there could be another, deeper explanation: the piece, as an individual piece, corresponds on the back wall to the individual piece on the front wall, the 'Shield'. The 'Shield' is *before* the entrance, and so still *outside* the war. The 'Shades' on the back wall, that is the 'shades' (σκιαί, *skiái*) in the underworld, however, already stand in the midst of war. The 'Shield' shows the world in its regular normality, *before* the worst breach in it that the world had ever known begins: the Trojan War, the 'mother of all wars'.⁸⁹ The 'Shades' show how the war ended, as every war will end: the three main actors—Achilles,⁹⁰

85 The *psychê* of Odysseus' mother Anticleia, whom Odysseus conjured up at the entrance to the underworld, explains it to her son as follows: "This is the appointed way with mortals, when one dies. For the sinews no longer hold the flesh and the bones together, but the strong force of blazing fire destroys these, as soon as the spirit leaves the white bones, and the ghost, like a dream, flutters off and is gone." (Odyssey 11.218–222; transl. A.T. Murray, rev. George E. Dimock, Loeb Classical Library, nos. 104–105, Cambridge, Mass., repr. with corrections, 1998).

86 HB IV, p. 16.

87 Langenberg 1998, 178. 180: "*Symmetrie-Achse*", "*Ruhe- und Symmetriepunkt*".

88 Leeman 2004, 76 f.

89 W. Frost in Mack in: Butt, op. cit., vol. 7, p. CLXIX, concluded in 1967: "As Pope's Analysis of Achilles' shield in Book XVIII suggests, we never lose our sense that a chaos of battle and a society of love, order, and justice are mirrors for one another." Twombly had read Pope's "Analysis" ('Observations on the Shield of Achilles', see above p. 155) with n. 38.

90 At the end of the *Iliad* he is still alive, but his immediately imminent death has already been predicted to him several times, by, among others, his mother

Patroclus,⁹¹ and Hector⁹²—have faded, they *are* no more.⁹³ The visitor who does *not* make the conventional ‘circuit’ but who—always looking both left and right—has walked down the center line towards the piece on the back wall, and now stands before the single piece, the ‘Shades’, will realize: the whole, violent action of the war, which in the four preceding pairs has been ever more strongly charged and intensified with aggression and horror—it ends here in death, in the death of those who had driven it forward so furiously and so full of living strength: ACHILLES, PATROCLUS, and HECTOR. At the end stands sorrow. The lovely world of the ‘Shield’ is over. The visitor is standing in front of the epitaph.⁹⁴

‘Achilles’, the strongest in life, is still the strongest even *after* death (the pure red of 2, 3, 4 and especially 5 [‘Vengeance’] turns into black): the *Odyssey* presents him as ruler over the dead in Hades (*Odyssey*, Book 11⁹⁵). ‘Patroclus’ is paler, and thus weaker: why? In Book 23 of the *Iliad*

Thetis (18.96: “For immediately after Hector is your own death ready at hand.” Transl. Murray/Wyatt).

91 Fallen in Book 16, 855–857 (killed by Apollo, Euphorbus, and Hector); comment by the poet: ὥς ἄρα μιν εἰπόντα τέλος θανάτοιο κάλυψε / ψυχὴ δ’ ἐκ ῥεθέων πταμένη Ἄϊδοςδὲ βεβήκει, / ὃν πότμον γοόωσα, λιποῦσ’ ἀνδροτῆτα καὶ ἥβην: “Just as he spoke these words the end of death enfolded him; and his soul fleeing from his limbs was gone to Hades, bewailing its fate, leaving manliness and youth.” (transl. Murray/Wyatt). In Pope Twombly read: “He faints; the Soul unwilling wings her way, / (The beauteous Body left a Load of Clay) / Flits to the lone, uncomfortable Coast; / A naked, wandring, melancholy Ghost!” (16.1032–1035).

92 Fallen in Book 22, lines 361–363 (killed by Achilles). Same comment by the poet as for Patroclus.

93 If it is correct to interpret the three large ‘clouds’ above which the names stand as ‘rosettes’ (Langenberg 1998, 179; after Bastian), such as are frequently “represented on the outer walls of ossuaries and sarcophagi” (a first idea of these may be given by the early Roman sarcophagus illustrated in the Wikipedia article ‘Sarcophagus of Lucius Cornelius Scipio Barbatus’, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sarcophagus_of_Lucius_Cornelius_Scipio_Barbatus — 9 June 2016; in the present context it is not possible to go into this point), then in these ‘rosettes’ we should see an ancient symbol for ‘dead’ (comparable to the Christian cross ‘†’, which follows the names of the dead in obituaries).

94 Cf. Temkin 2000, 133: “Presiding over the gallery from the far wall is the monumental *Shades of Achilles, Patroclus, and Hector*, an elegiac salute to the three fallen heroes of the war.”

95 *Odyssey* 11.482–486 (Odysseus at the entrance to the underworld to the ‘shade’ of Achilles): “no man before this was more blessed than you, Achilles, nor shall ever be hereafter. For before, when you were alive, we Argives honored you equally

(23.65 ff.) Achilles, sleeping uneasily, sees the *psychê* of the dead Patroclus in a dream, who beseeches him to bury him. For unless he is buried, he flits around restlessly at the river of the dead, Acheron, and cannot cross over to the *psychai*, 'souls', that is, 'shades'. Thus at the end of the *Iliad* Patroclus is dead but, so to speak, not yet *entirely* so:⁹⁶ the strong blue fades into gray. Finally 'Hector': now just a small, pale-gray shadow of a thing. War has consumed its 'heroes'.⁹⁷

Leeman in his Twombly book of 2004 has a notable section with the title 'The narration of myth'.⁹⁸ Twombly's 'cycle' is, so it seems, one such narration. Ostensibly it seems to narrate just the history of the horror of the Trojan War, but the cycle does not stop there. It is not a simple 'history painting'. *Behind* the cycle stands an idea, an 'ιδέα, *idéa*' in Plato's sense: the process of an-nihil-ation (*nihil*, Lat. 'nothing')—the turning of that which is, into nothing.⁹⁹

with the gods, and now that you are here, you rule mightily among the dead. Therefore, grieve not at all that you are dead, Achilles." (Transl. Murray/Dimock).

96 The status of the unburied dead is described by the 'shade' (the σκιά, *skiá* ['shadow', as in *Odyssey* 10. 495], or the ψυχή, *psyché* ['breath', later translated in English as 'soul'], the εἶδωλον, *eidolon* ['idol', 'picture', 'image', 'imago', 'imagination']) of Patroclus to Achilles as a dream vision in Book 23 of the *Iliad*, lines 69–74, very precisely: "Bury me with all speed, let me pass inside the gates of Hades. / Far do the spirits [*psychai*] keep me away, the phantoms [*eidola*] of the wearied [i.e. the dulled, the faded, those who have vanished from life], / and they do not yet allow me to mingle with them beyond the river [Acheron], / but vainly I wander through the wide-gated house of Hades." (Transl. Murray/Wyatt; slightly altered, JL). In Pope's translation (23.87–92) Twombly would have read this passage in a rather less precise version, but in Pope's annotation to line 92 he would have found the following correct explanation: "It was the common Opinion of the Ancients, that the Souls of the Departed were not admitted into the Number of the Happy till their Bodies had receive'd the funeral Rites". Cf. Leeman 2004, 76.

97 With more depth HB IV, p. 29: "This painting is certainly the contemplative focus of the cycle; in painted epigraph, life and death are united in the repetition of the same symbolic form and, in Achilles' blood the soul of his enemy becomes pure visuality. An ephemeral hermeticism of devotion becomes a metaphysical lament of reconciliation that dies with Hector's name in a range of silver notes."

98 Leeman 2004, 152–156.

99 Thus also, in principle, in Temkin 2000, 133: "Nine paintings in the adjoining gallery present the chronological unfolding of the story, progressing from the scene of Achilles' pivotal decision to join the fight against Troy (Iliam) to an almost blank canvas imbued with the silence of death." This interpretation, I

From all that we know, Twombly was a shy, peaceable person of depth. It is hard to believe that with this cycle he merely wanted to call to mind some classical story, or even wanted to retell it. Even less plausible is that he would have wished to *celebrate* war.¹⁰⁰ Rather, it seems, he wanted to use *his* means, the means of the most extreme abstraction, to show the *horror belli*. In general. Timelessly.¹⁰¹ He seems to have succeeded.

ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

All works by Cy Twombly: © Cy Twombly Foundation, New York / Rome
1 © Cy Twombly Foundation, from: Greub 2008 (as n. 80), 273 ill. 7.

2.1-2.3, 3-5, 8-16 © Cy Twombly Foundation. Courtesy Archives Nicola Del Roscio.

6 from: Klaus Fittschen: *Bildkunst*, Teil 1: Der Schild des Achilleus. In: *Archaeologia Homerica*, vol. II, fascicle N, p. N8, fig. 1.

7 from: Butt, op. cit., vol. 7, after 366.

17 from: Mack in: Butt, op. cit., vol. 7, 82.

plan © Thierry Greub / Kathrin Roussel.

believe, is far too superficial in seeing in the cycle only that which is illustrative. The core meaning lies deeper.

100 To speak of “the epic militarism of the paintings of Troy” (Varnedoe in: New York 1994, 47) seems misguided.

101 Langenberg 1998, 180 f. is also thinking in this direction, if rather hazily: “Twombly is probably less concerned with a representation of the world as a whole [?] than of that of a war in its paradigmatic structure and significance.” (transl.).

DIETRICH BOSCHUNG

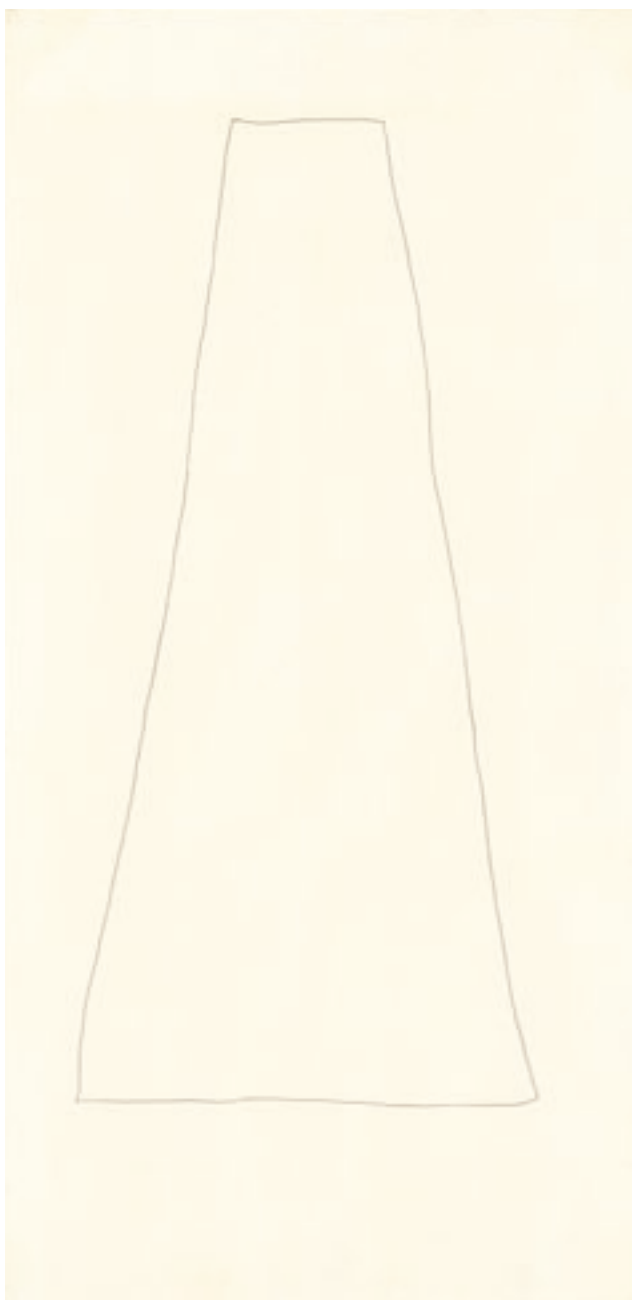
CNIDIAN VENUS

In April 1967 in the Roman gallery “La Tartaruga” four paintings by Cy Twombly were exhibited under the title *Cnidian Venus* (ills. 1–4).¹ All four show a tall, trapeze-like form, the first more narrowly proportioned than the rest; the scale, too, of the first picture is notably narrower (205 × 100 rather than 200 × 170 cm). The material support of the image is in all cases canvas, but the technique changes from picture to picture: the first is a lead pencil drawing; the second is executed with lead pencil and wax crayon; the third and fourth are done with house paint, wax crayon, and lead pencil. The first trapeze is drawn more precisely than the subsequent three, in which the lateral lines are somewhat bent, repeated, or interrupted.

While the first drawing has no written text, the other three bear the inscription “*Cnidian V.*” in differing forms of execution. On the second the inscription occurs twice—blurrily above, in clearly legible letters below. On the third and fourth drawing the designation can be read once each, under the trapeze, with letter-strokes of differing weights and, in part, differing forms. These inscriptions are more ambiguous than the title of the cycle might lead one to expect. An expansion of the abbreviation “V.” as “Venus” is obvious, but not strictly necessary. And why are only three of the four drawings inscribed, and why is one of them doubly so? In a somewhat later work, from 1967, which resumes the theme, Twombly has crossed out the word “Cnidian” and let only the first and last letters stand;² the “V.” is not present. The reference to the *Cnidia* has been established through the writing, but has subsequently been canceled again.

1 HB III 7–10.—This paper comments upon some aspects from the point of view of a Classical Archaeologist, without in this setting being able to go into detail on the issues connected with the archaeological objects. The citations are consequently limited to the necessary minimum.

2 HB III 23.



1 Cy Twombly: *Cnidian Venus*, Rome, 1966, lead pencil on canvas, 205 × 100 cm, Collection Cy Twombly Foundation



2 Cy Twombly: *Cnidian Venus*, Rome, 1966, wax crayon, lead pencil
on canvas, 200 × 170 cm, Collection Cy Twombly Foundation



3 Cy Twombly: *Cnidian Venus*, Rome, 1966, oil-based house paint, wax crayon, lead pencil on canvas, 199.8 × 170 cm, whereabouts unknown, formerly Dia Center for the Arts



4 Cy Twombly: *Cnidian Venus*, Rome, 1966, oil-based house paint, wax crayon, lead pencil on canvas, 200 × 170 cm, Private Collection

Both the title of the whole cycle (*Cnidian Venus*) and the inscriptions on the individual pictures evoke one of the most famous statues of Greek antiquity, namely the naked Aphrodite created around 340 BC by Praxiteles of Athens, which stood as the cult image in the Temple of Aphrodite in Cnidos.³ The designation 'Cnidia', i.e. 'the Cnidian' is in fact a common way to refer to this statue, so the inscription "Cnidian" is in fact unambiguous.

The statue is treated in detail in the *Natural History* of the Elder Pliny: "Superior to anything not merely by Praxiteles, but in the whole world, is the Venus, which many people have sailed to Cnidos to see. He had made two figures, which he put up for sale together. One of them was draped and for this reason was preferred by the people of Cos, who had an option on the sale, although he offered it at the same price as the other. This they considered to be the only decent and dignified course of action. The statue which they refused was purchased by the people of Cnidos and achieved an immeasurably greater reputation. Later King Nicomedes was anxious to buy it from them, promising so to discharge all the state's vast debts. The Cnidians, however, preferred to suffer anything but this, and rightly so; for with this statue Praxiteles made Cnidos a famous city. The shrine in which it stands is entirely open so as to allow the image of the goddess to be viewed from every side, and it is believed to have been made in this way with the blessing of the goddess herself. The statue is equally admirable from every angle. There is a story that a man once fell in love with it and hiding by night embraced it, and that a stain betrays this lustful act."⁴

An unusually large number of stories, legends, and anecdotes wove themselves around the statue, concerning its creation, its material value, and its erotic impact. Other ancient texts confirm the details of this report: the Aphrodite of Cnidos stood as cult statue in a temple; the figure was

3 Christian S. Blinkenberg: *Knidia. Beiträge zur Kenntnis der praxitelischen Aphrodite*. Copenhagen 1933. — Antonio Corso: The Cnidian Aphrodite. In: Ian Jenkins / Geoffrey B. Waywell: *Sculptors and Sculpture of Caria and the Dodecanese*. London 1997, 91–98. — Caterina Maderna: Die Gleichzeitigkeit des Andersartigen. In: Peter C. Bol: *Die Geschichte der antiken Bildhauerkunst II. Klassische Plastik*. Mainz 2004, 328–330, 533 on ill. 297–300 with further literature.

4 Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* 36, 20–21. Translation by D.E. Eichholz: *Pliny. Natural History*, vol. 10 (Loeb Classical Library, no. 419), Cambridge, Mass., 1962. Similarly but more briefly Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* 7, 127.

entirely naked, covering her pubic area with one hand.⁵ It was a world-famous sight; it was displayed to be visible from all sides, and was of equal beauty from all points of view. Many sources report that the back of the statue could be viewed, and that it was just as attractive as the front view. That is remarkable for a cult statue, because cult statues in most cases stood in front of a wall, so their back was not visible. Many texts also confirm the powerful erotic impact of the statue by reporting—like Pliny—its nocturnal amorous escapade. An especially dramatic report is that of the Byzantine author Tzetzes, who wrote in the twelfth century drawing on older sources. According to his account, a prostitute (πορνή) called Ischas stilled the frenzy that the statue enflamed in Macareus of Perinthos.⁶ The woman's name is significant, because the Greek word ἰσχάς can mean not just a fig, but in an obscene usage it can also designate the vulva.⁷

The text of Pliny says that the statue had won the favor of the goddess herself (*effigies dea favente ipsa, ut creditur, facta*). Some poems in the *Anthologia Graeca* elaborate on this point: they report, in differing variants, that Aphrodite herself had come to Cnidos to view her much discussed statue and that the goddess was surprised to see herself represented so exactly:

Cypris, seeing Cypris in Cnidos, said, "Alas! alas!
Where did Praxiteles see me naked?"⁸

The point of this poem is clear: Praxiteles had so precisely represented the goddess of love in her somatic appearance that it was as if she had posed as his model, or as if Praxiteles had seen the goddess naked without her knowledge. And even the love goddess herself had seen the statue

⁵ Ps.-Lucian, *Amores* 13. English translation by M.D. Macleod in: Lucian, vol. 8 (Loeb Classical Library, no. 432), Cambridge, Mass., 1967.—The literary sources are collected in Klaus Hallof / Sascha Kansteiner / Bernd Seidensticker: *Der neue Overbeck*. Berlin/Boston 2014, nos 1855–1888.

⁶ Antonio Corso: *Prassitele: Fonti epigrafiche e letterarie. Vita e opere* III, Fonti letterarie bizantine (circa 470–XIII sec.). *Xenia Quaderni* 10. Rome 1991, 147, 150–156.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 152 with n. 2687.—Ischas as hetaira name in Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistai* XIII 587d–e.

⁸ *Anthologia Graeca* XVI 162. Transl. from: *The Greek Anthology*. With an English translation by W.R. Paton, vol. 5 (Loeb Classical Library, no. 86), Cambridge, Mass., 1918.—Similarly, *Epigrams* XVI 160, 168.

of Praxiteles as the image of herself and had, through her exclamation, certified it as an authentic representation, as an exact full-figure portrait.⁹ Another epigram even supposes that the Aphrodite in Cnidos was no statue at all, but the love goddess herself who here showed herself in the pose of the Judgement of Paris.¹⁰

However, there was also another tradition, which Pliny suppresses even though it goes back to the third century BC and lasted into late antiquity: by that account the model for the statue was a hetaira (Phryne or Cratine) whom Praxiteles had fallen in love with.¹¹

The numerous ancient texts ensured that a knowledge of Praxiteles' statue of Aphrodite in Cnidos was still preserved into the Middle Ages and the early modern period. From the Renaissance onwards, attempts were repeatedly made to identify the figure among the surviving ancient sculptures.¹² In the eighteenth century many authors postulated that Praxiteles' statue was transmitted in the *Venus Medici* in Florence,¹³ which prompted the production of a large number of modern copies of it. Some are displayed as suggested by the description in Pliny: in a circular temple that allows a view from all sides. In the early nineteenth century Ennio Quirino Visconti and Konrad Levezov showed that a statue in the Vatican Museums matched the figure type of the Aphrodite of Cnidos.¹⁴ The principal argument for the identification was provided by coins of the city of Cnidos from the Roman imperial period, on which the statue is represented (ill. 5). This identification has subsequently been confirmed;

⁹ The statue of Zeus in Olympia, too, is said to have been certified by the god as an authentic depiction; cf. Pausanias V 11,9.

¹⁰ *Anthologia Graeca* XVI 161.

¹¹ First transmitted, in a record by Poseidippus (of Pella?), in Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistai* XIII 591a. Cf. Verena Lily Brüsche-Mooser: *Ausgewählte Künstleranekdoten. Eine Quellenuntersuchung*. Zurich 1973, pp. 199–203, 236 nos 20–23.

¹² Berthold Hinz: Knidische Aphrodite. In: *Der Neue Pauly. Enzyklopädie der Antike* 14. Stuttgart/Weimar 2000, col. 981–988.

¹³ Dietrich Boschung: Die Rezeption antiker Statuen als Diskurs. Das Beispiel der Venus Medici. In: Kathrin Schade / Detlef Rößler / Alfred Schäfer (ed.): *Zentren und Wirkungsräume der Antikerezeption. Zur Bedeutung von Raum und Kommunikation für die neuzeitliche Transformation der griechisch-römischen Antike*. Paderborn 2007, 165–175.

¹⁴ Berthold Hinz: *Aphrodite. Geschichte einer abendländischen Passion*. Munich/Vienna 1998, esp. 225–231.



5 Bronze drachma of Caracalla with the Aphrodite of Cnidos (Paris, Bibl. Nat.)

and the Cnidian Aphrodite of Praxiteles is now to be found in most works on the history of Greek art. The statue in the Vatican is usually the one illustrated, because it is still today regarded as the best replica; in particular, it is an important source for the reconstruction of the body, garment, and vase of the lost original.¹⁵ A reconstruction in plaster has attempted to correct the erroneous modern supplements and so to give a better picture of Praxiteles' statue (ills. 6–7). It combines the body of the Vatican statue with a head in Paris, and alters (on the basis of other replicas) the angle of the head and the position of the right hand.¹⁶

In reality the transmission of the statue is complicated. Praxiteles' original is lost. Taken as a whole, the very large number of Roman copies that derive from the statue do not yield a single picture in the details; this is revealed for example by the side-by-side comparison of the statue in Munich with the reconstructed figure based on the Vatican statue: the

15 *Aphrodite Colonna*: Blinkenberg, op. cit., pp. 121–125, Pls. 1–2, no. I 1.—Georg Lippold: *Die Skulpturen des Vatikanischen Museums* III/2. Berlin 1956, pp. 526–531 Pls. 238–240 no. 474.

16 Illustrated e.g. in Karl Schefold: *Die Griechen und ihre Nachbarn. Propyläen Kunstgeschichte* I. Berlin 1967 p. 191 no. 107 Pl. 107.



6 Statue of Aphrodite of Cnidos, reconstruction in plaster (Szczecin); front and rear view



7 Statue of Aphrodite of Knidos, reconstruction in plaster (Szczecin); front and rear view

differences in scale, in the elaboration of the vase, in the position of the left hand, are clear.¹⁷ That may be due to the fact that the cult statue in the sanctuary of Aphrodite could not simply be measured or even copied. For the treatment of the surface, we can get an idea from an extant original work by Praxiteles, namely the statue of Hermes from Olympia.¹⁸ The body, in forceful movement, is subdivided by only a few clearly identifiable lines; far more often, its plastic forms run into each other smoothly and without recognizable boundaries. Yet the smooth, shimmering skin contrasts with the fissured texture of the folds in the garment and with the ruffled hair. We may assume a similarly refined representation of the surfaces in the Aphrodite statue in Cnidos too; the Roman copyists (and modern restorers) have admittedly never achieved this perfection of surface treatment, and so have not been able to reproduce it.

What is clear is that the goddess appeared nude, laying the garment that she has just removed onto a hydria, a large water jug. The nudity is thus justified by the fact that Aphrodite is preparing to take a bath. The head turned to one side signals that the goddess is in her own sphere, so she is visible to the viewer but still remains inaccessible.¹⁹

The influence of Praxiteles' statue was immense: the figure's stance, posture, and angle of the head were adopted and varied by many Greek and Roman sculptors in the following centuries.²⁰ This confirms the reports of the ancient texts of the importance and fame of Aphrodite of Cnidos. Praxiteles' statue shaped not only the ancient view of Aphrodite, but also—both directly and indirectly—her image in the Middle Ages, Renaissance, and the modern era.

17 On the reconstruction of the lost statue from Roman replicas: Ernst Berger / Brigitte Müller-Huber / Lukas Thommen: *Der Entwurf des Künstlers. Bildhauerkanon in der Antike und Neuzeit*. Basel 1992, pp. 140–141, 256–259 no. 30.—Barbara Vierneisel-Schlörb: *Glyptothek München. Katalog der Skulpturen II. Klassische Skulpturen*. München 1979, pp. 323–348 on no. 31.

18 Reinhard Lullies: *Griechische Plastik von den Anfängen bis zum Ausgang des Hellenismus*. München 1956, Pls. 220–223.

19 Gerhart Rodenwaldt: *Theoi rheia zoontes. Abhandlungen der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 1943, 13. Berlin 1944, 14–17.—Adolf Borbein: Die griechische Statue des 4. Jhs. v. Chr. Formanalytische Untersuchungen zur Kunst der Nachklassik. In: *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts* 88 (1973), esp. 172–174 ill. 91–93.

20 Vierneisel-Schlörb, op. cit., 334–335.—R.R.R. Smith: *Hellenistic Sculpture*. London 1991, 79–83.

It is clear that Cy Twombly, by the title of the cycle and the inscriptions on the pictures, is evoking a very specific, famous statue and its complex reception since antiquity, but it is also clear that in these drawings he completely ignores its iconography. It is possible to trace trapeze-like constellations of lines in the statue, for example in the outline of the arms and the shoulders, in the contour of the hips, or in the upper part of the bundled garment. But they are not significant for the structure of the statue; and in no case do they yield a closed geometric figure that matches Twombly's drawings, which, for their part, entirely ignore the movement and plastic effect of the female body.

Now, already in antiquity there were some cult images of Aphrodite that were based on an entirely different concept. Thus the cult image in the most important and most famous sanctuary of the goddess of love, in Paphos, was aniconic and consisted of a conically tapering, dark stone (ill. 8).²¹ That undoubtedly matches Cy Twombly's picture far better, but here too there are major differences: the cult image in Paphos



8 Silver coin of Vespasian with the cult image of Venus of Paphos, AD 76–77, London, British Museum

21 *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* II. Zurich/Munich 1984, 9 Pl. 6 s.v. Aphrodite no. 1 (reference from Frank Wascheck). Cf. on this recently the study by Milette Gaifman: *Aniconism in Greek Antiquity*. Oxford 2012, on Paphos esp. 170–179.

is three-dimensional and tapers to a cone; the *Cnidia* of Twombly is a two-dimensional, broad trapeze; above all however: it has nothing to do with the *Cnidia*.

A comment by Cy Twombly himself about this work is recorded by Richard Leeman: "Twombly found the inspiration for it (i.e., *Cnidian Venus*) by his own account in the characteristically shaped walkway of —the Sibyl's Grotto in Cumae, and this form evokes for him in well-nigh perfect fashion the female anatomy."²²

This is a roughly 130 m long and ca. 5 m high walkway cut into the rock; it is lit in part by light shafts (ill. 9).²³ It has a trapeze-shaped cross-section, which comes close to Twombly's drawing, and leads to the so-called Sibyl's Grotto in Cumae. Amadeo Maiuri, who discovered and excavated this 'dromos' in 1932, interpreted the complex as the site of the oracle in which the legendary Sibyl of Cumae is said to have pronounced her prophecies. Virgil reports in the *Aeneid*²⁴ that she had shown Aeneas the way to the Underworld, where he was able to ask questions of his father Anchises and to see the heroes of future Roman history, including in particular Augustus. Ovid relates²⁵ that Apollo had granted her great age but not eternal youth, so that she gradually faded away until only her voice was left. As an old woman she is said to have sold to the Roman king Tarquinius Priscus three Sibylline Books, which then for centuries were used in Rome as books of oracles.²⁶ Petronius has the parvenu Trimalchio relate his encounter with the Sibyl: "Nam Sibyllam quidem Cumis ego ipse oculis meis vidi in ampulla pendere. Et cum illi pueri dicerent: 'Σιβυλλα, τί θέλεις?' respondebat illa: 'ἀποθανεῖν θελῶ'."²⁷ These lines are well known as the motto given by T.S. Eliot as epigraph

²² Leeman 2005, 191, 198 with n. 2 [English version here is translated from the German].

²³ Amadeo Maiuri: *Die Altertümer der phlegräischen Felder. Vom Grab des Vergil bis zur Höhle von Cumae*. Rome 1938, 121–132. Maiuri dates the oldest parts of the walkway to the fifth century BC.

²⁴ Virgil, *Aeneis* 6, 42–157.

²⁵ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 14, 101–153.

²⁶ Cf. on this Jörg-Dieter Gauger: *Sibyllische Weissagungen*. Zurich 2002, 380–388.

²⁷ Petronius, *Satyricon* 48,8 ("Yes, and I myself with my own eyes saw the Sibyl at Cumae hanging in a flask; and when the boys cried at her: 'Sibyl, Sibyl, what do you want?' 'I would that I were dead,' she used to answer." From Petronius, with an English translation by Michael Heseltine, revised by E.H. Warmington [Loeb Classical Library no. 15], Cambridge, Mass., 1969).



9 Entrance to the grotto of the Sibyl of Cumae;
Cumae near Naples

to his *Waste Land*. That is undoubtedly a noble line of tradition—from Virgil and Ovid via T.S. Eliot to Cy Twombly—but one that leads nowhere, for all this has nothing whatsoever to do with either Cnidos or Venus.

We are left with the statement by Twombly that the trapeze shape of the entrance to the Sibyl's Grotto for him, for reasons that were presumably known only to himself, evoked the female anatomy in a perfect way.

In that case it is perhaps natural that he would use this form to represent Venus, the ancient goddess of love who personified ideal female beauty and sensuality. This would set up against the traditional iconography of Venus a provocative alternative version. Admittedly, he ignores the dimension of depth in the walkway and reduces it to its cross-section. It may be suspected that the painter associated the long hollow walkway and its entrance with the female genitalia, and linked that association with the Cnidia—in a similar way to how Tzetzes had thought of the statue as being replaced by a prostitute called ‘Fig’ (= vulva). Then the abbreviation ‘V.’ in the picture inscriptions could stand not just for ‘V(enus)’ but also for ‘V(ulva)’ or ‘V(agina)’.

While the Greek Aphrodite had a healthy, ageless, and flawless body, Twombly’s Cnidia is a geometrical figure whose lines visibly blur into each other. Praxiteles had acquired his idea from a living model, whether it be Aphrodite herself, or whether it be from an Aphrodite-like hetaira—this at least was the view of the ancient authors. His statue is full of movement and liveliness, it has a three-dimensional (bodily) presence and a tangible erotic aura. Twombly’s starting point is the uniform boundary of an artificially and architectonically designed cavity. His image is consequently two-dimensional, still, and static.

Although Twombly elides the iconographic tradition of antiquity, he uses the literary tradition for his own ends. The fourfold repetition of the representation may pick up the tradition that the Venus of Cnidos was equally beautiful and worth seeing from all sides. Above all, however, by the title of his cycle Twombly claimed for his own work the prestige and authority of the ancient statue: it is the Cnidia which was ranked as the most important art work in the whole world and should now once again be counted the most important art work. Aphrodite had even recognized herself in this image; it is this representation that she herself had attested as authentic. The claim by the painter that is voiced—earnestly or ironically—in the inscription on his pictures is, thus, that he has drawn the only true picture of the goddess of love. If Aphrodite were to come into the gallery, she would necessarily—and perhaps, this time too, uncomfortably surprised—ask, “Damn! Where did Cy Twombly see me naked?”

ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

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1-4 © Cy Twombly Foundation. Courtesy Archives Nicola Del Roscio.

5 from: Blinkenberg, op. cit., ill. 80.

6-7 D-DAI-ROM-6850; 6851.

8 from: Gaifman, op. cit., p. 172 ill. 4.21, Photograph: Trustees of the British Museum.

9 Cologne, CoDArchLab, Photothek.



1 Cy Twombly: *Thyrsis*, Bassano in Teverina, 1977, 3 parts, various materials, 300 × 198 (side panels) and 300 × 412 cm (central panel), Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie, Berlin, Hamburger Bahnhof, Marx Collection

JÜRGEN HAMMERSTAEDT

CY TWOMBLY'S *THYRSIS* TRIPTYCH AND THE HELLENISTIC PASTORAL POETRY OF THEOCRITUS

An important interest of the Morphomata International Center is the study of particularities in the specific formulations of certain ideas and notions, as well as research into the dynamics of the creation, persistence, and adaptation of forms over time, and into the media that are used in this. Adopting this research approach, the present paper will discuss Cy Twombly's 1977 *Thyrsis* triptych, a work in which we find an interplay between script and image, and a modernist reshaping of a piece of Hellenistic poetry (ill. 1). It is on display at the Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart in Berlin. It is part of the collection of Dr. Erich Marx, the collection with which the museum was opened in 1996.¹

I will first present Twombly's triptych and the poem cited in the picture, namely the First Idyll of the Hellenistic poet Theocritus. Then, bearing in mind previous observations and interpretive approaches, an attempt will be made to cast more light on Twombly's way of working with text in pictures, by analyzing the elements of the picture and of Theocritean pastoral. The sheer size of the object and the problem of perspective in photographs makes it difficult to get adequate documentation for a scholarly study of the triptych. The finely drawn elements appearing on parts of a large, otherwise unpainted white surface, can only be reproduced in an unsatisfactory way in an image of the object as a whole.

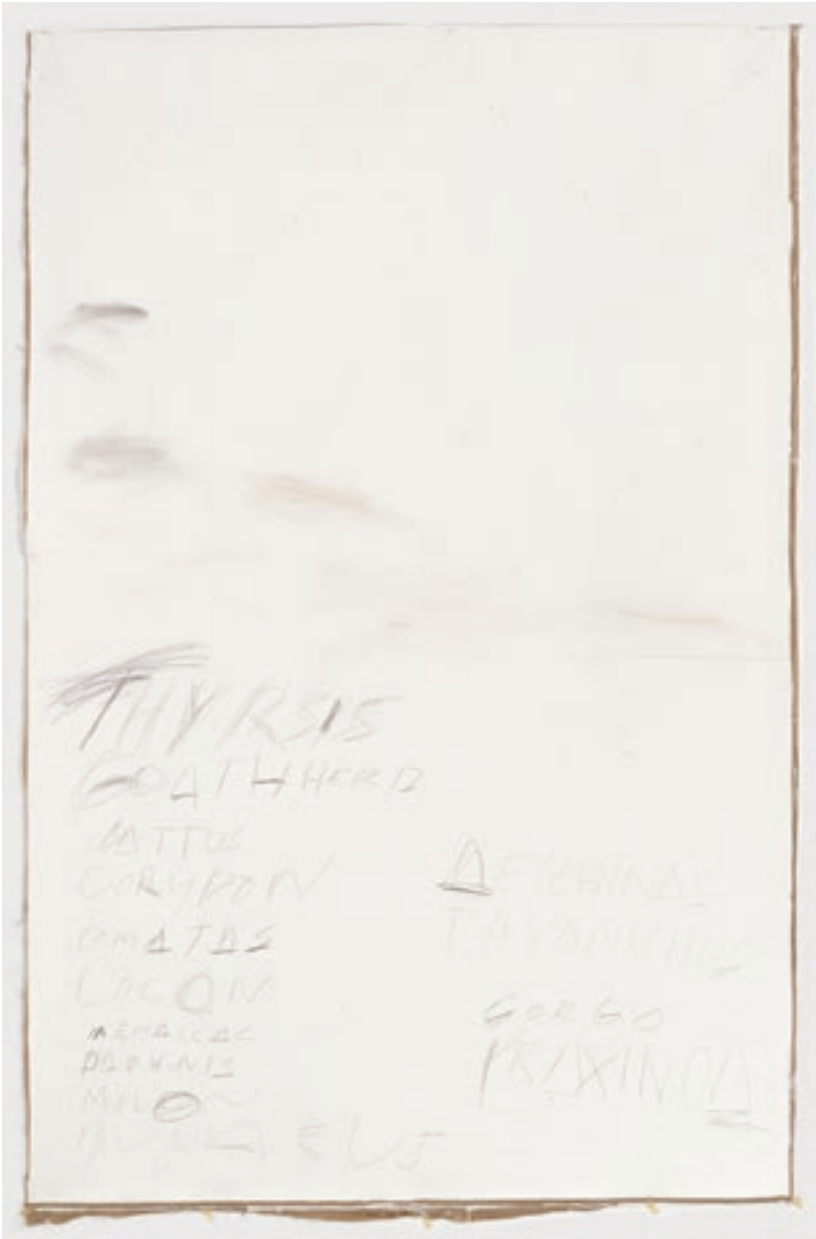
1 HB IV 8.

For that reason, let us approach the three parts of the picture one by one, and from left to right. This viewing sequence matches the basic orientation that had become canonical already in early Greece, after some early variation, and which was transferred to other writing systems depending on the Greek model, such as the Latin one; the use of this conventional writing orientation in the picture, as also in the content and the sequence of texts included here, fully justifies this approach, and indeed strongly advises it.

The lower half of the left panel is written upon in capital letters, which are divided into two columns (ill. 2). The left column begins rather higher and extends in ten lines all the way to the lower edge of the picture, whereas the right column consists of only four lines, which, however, are executed in far larger size.

Left column:	Characters:
<i>THYRSIS</i>	The title character of Theocr. 1
<i>GOATHHERD</i>	A dialog character in Theocr. 1
<i>BATTUS</i>	1st dialog character in Theocr. 4 (<i>Nomeis</i>)
<i>CORYDON</i>	2nd dialog character in Theocr. 4 (<i>Nomeis</i>)
<i>COMATAS</i>	1st dialog character in Theocr. 5 (<i>Aipolikon</i>)
<i>LOCON</i> (corrected into <i>LOCAN</i>)	= Lacon; 2nd dialog character in Theocr. 5
<i>MENALCAS</i>	1st dialog character in Theocr. 8+9 (<i>Bukolistai</i>)
<i>DAPHNIS</i>	2nd dialog character in Theocr. 8+9 (<i>Bukolistai</i>)
<i>MILON</i>	1st dialog character in Theocr. 10 (<i>Ergatinai</i>)
<i>BUCAEUS</i>	2nd dialog character in Theocr. 10 (<i>Ergatinai</i>)
Right column:	Characters:
<i>AESCHINAS</i>	Theocr. 14 (<i>Aischinas kai Thyonichos</i>)
<i>THYONICHUS</i>	Theocr. 14 (<i>Aischinas kai Thyonichos</i>)
<i>GORGON</i>	1st dialog character in Theocr. 15 (<i>Adoniazusai</i>)
<i>PRAXINOIA</i>	2nd dialog character in Theocr. 15 (<i>Adoniazusai</i>)

As can be seen here, these are Greek personal names in a Latinized English version. They can all be derived from characters in the *Idylls* of Theocritus.



2 Detail of ill. 1, left panel of Cy Twombly's *Thyrsis*, 1977, lead pencil, charcoal on primed canvas, 300 × 198 cm, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie, Berlin, Hamburger Bahnhof, Marx Collection

Thyrsis, set in emphasized script in capital letters at the start, is the title-character not only of the triptych, but also of the poem of Theocritus traditionally counted as the first in the collection of *Idylls*. Alongside him, in somewhat eccentric English spelling, is the Goatherd who appears in *Idyll* 1 as the unnamed interlocutor. The next two names, Battus and Corydon, are the pair who appear in *Idyll* 4, which is given the title *Nomeis* ("Herdsmen") in the manuscripts. Comatas and Lacon—not "Locon" and also not "Locan", to which it was probably altered afterwards—contest the fifth poem, which bears the title *Aipolikon* or *Poinemikon*, that is, "(Goat-) Herdsmen's" poem. Menalcas and Daphnis are the pair of speakers in the eighth and ninth idylls (which are also counted as Poems 2 and 3 of the *Bukolistai*/"Cowherds" poems). The final pair is formed by Milon and Bucaeus, who appear in *Idyll* 10, the *Ergatinai* ("farm workers") or *Theristai* ("harvesters").

Twombly has thus counted out in pairs the cast of select idylls by Theocritus in a traditional order, as he found them in the translation that he used. He skips the second and third idylls, as well as the seventh, because these poems are not constructed as dialogs. The absence of the pair that appears in *Idyll* 6 can also be explained easily. For here, as well as a certain Damoetas, there appears the same Daphnis who occurs along with Menalcas in *Idylls* 8 and 9, so by not taking this idyll into account the naming of Daphnis twice can be avoided.

By following the same principles, the right column can also be explained. Aeschinas and Thyonichus are the title- and dialog-characters of *Idyll* 14, whereas the two female characters, Gorgo and Praxinoa, appear in *Idyll* 15, which has the title "The women at the Festival of Adonis". The previous (and following) idylls do not have any pairs of names as characters, and so have been ignored. It is striking that the pairs of speakers in the right column appear in two poems that belong not in the pastoral context of the idylls in the first column, but in an urban, Alexandrian setting. Is this separation mere chance?

In the second panel (ill. 3) the actual design begins somewhat higher than in the left and right parts of the triptych, but likewise only from the middle third of it. A first, short line in capital letters, centered slightly to the left of the panel's midpoint, is followed by a second line in cursive script, strongly indented to the right and reaching as far as the right edge of the picture:

I AM THYRSIS OF ETNA

blessed with a tuneful voice



3 Central panel of Cy Twombly's *Thyrsis*, oil paint, lead pencil, wax crayon on primed canvas, 300 × 412 cm, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie, Berlin, Hamburger Bahnhof, Marx Collection



4 Cy Twombly: *Idilli (I am Thyrsis of Etna blessed with a tuneful voice)*, Rome, August 1976, 2 parts, Part I, collage: (drawing paper, transparent adhesive tape), oil paint, watercolor, wax crayon, pencil, 134.3 × 150.3 cm, Stuttgart, Collection Froehlich

The same words were written by Twombly already in the previous year, 1976, on three collages titled *Idilli*, two of which form a diptych (ill. 4).²

There the distribution of capitals and cursive is the same as in our picture. We can see that the artist was interested in this subdivision, because this distribution is also present in the *Idilli* diptych illustrated, irrespective of the different division of lines.

The two lines in the central panel of the *Thyrsis* triptych tend downwards at the right, a movement that is picked up by the color formation below it. Above the large, dark-green splash, applied very precisely in the center, can be seen a smeared trace reaching downwards to right, at first red, then blue, then undefinable in color. According to the interpretation of Jutta Göricke,³ this evokes the color-mood of the *locus amoenus*, the literary landscape in which the *Bucolics* of Theocritus are set. In addition, this downward movement, as can be guessed already at the right edge, continues in the final panel of the triptych (ill. 5).

Here too the creative element is played out in the lower half of the picture. The three thick, dark splashes of paint pick up the splash in the central panel, but they begin notably higher than it, and the emphasis of the strokes follows one continuous direction and movement. The whole triptych is marked by the fact that the downward movement continues and strengthens rightwards from the central panel. According to the interpretation of Göricke⁴ these signs, in the manner of a musical score, pick up the spoken melody and stress-rhythm of the couplet written in the central panel. The first splash of paint on the central panel, on this reading, stands for the whole statement of the first line, with the white line of oil paint marking the pause that follows. The following three paint splashes on the third panel, which once again begin higher up and continue the sinking line of the second line of writing of the central panel, would thus mark the three stresses and the falling spoken melody of this second line: "blésed with a túneful voíce".

Above this, within a framing element and in a fast, cursive script, five lines are also jotted down, the first four of which all begin at the left edge of the surrounding frame (ill. 6):

² YL VI 197–199.

³ Göricke 1996, 124.

⁴ Ibid.



5 Right panel of Cy Twombly's *Thyrsis*, oil paint, lead pencil, charcoal on primed canvas, 300 × 198 cm, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie, Berlin, Hamburger Bahnhof, Marx Collection



6 Right panel of *Thyrsis*: close-up of the writing

sweeten your sweet mouth with [[- - -]]
 THYRSIS with honeycomb. [[- - -]]
 of Aegilus finest figs f[[- - -]]
 outsings the crickets. [[- - -]]
 Smell friend, its sharp freshness

To right, below the framing element, the artist's signature is added, with the last two digits of the year in which the work was created, 1977.

The ends of the lines are painted over in white paint, as is a first line that stands above the framing element. Yet the whitewashed words can be reconstructed with the help of the traces and of the use of the same text in a different work by Twombly. It can be read on the back of the third sheet of a later work, the *Bacchanalia* series, together with two other lines that follow it, and was first cited in the scholarly literature in 1984 (ill. 7).⁵

⁵ Baden-Baden 1984, 157, note to Cat. no. 48, where a slightly erroneous transcription has subsequently led to confusion:

For his quotation, as Yvon Lambert⁶ established, Twombly used the translation of Theocritus' *Idylls* that first appeared in 1974 in the Penguin Classics series, by Anthony Holden, an author who studied in Oxford and later became known for his well regarded biographies of Tchaikowsky and Lorenzo da Ponte, but also of Prince Charles. Thanks to this model, in the Theocritus quotations given below it has been possible to make a substantial improvement in the reading of Twombly's not always easily legible script, compared to the transcriptions that have been published to date.

Together with the overpainted words, the text on the right panel of the triptych reads as follows:

[[Thyrsis' Lament for Daphnis]]
 Sweeten your sweet mouth with [[honey,]]
 THYRSIS with honey comb. [[Eat your fill]]⁷
 of Aegilus finest figs f[[or your voice]]

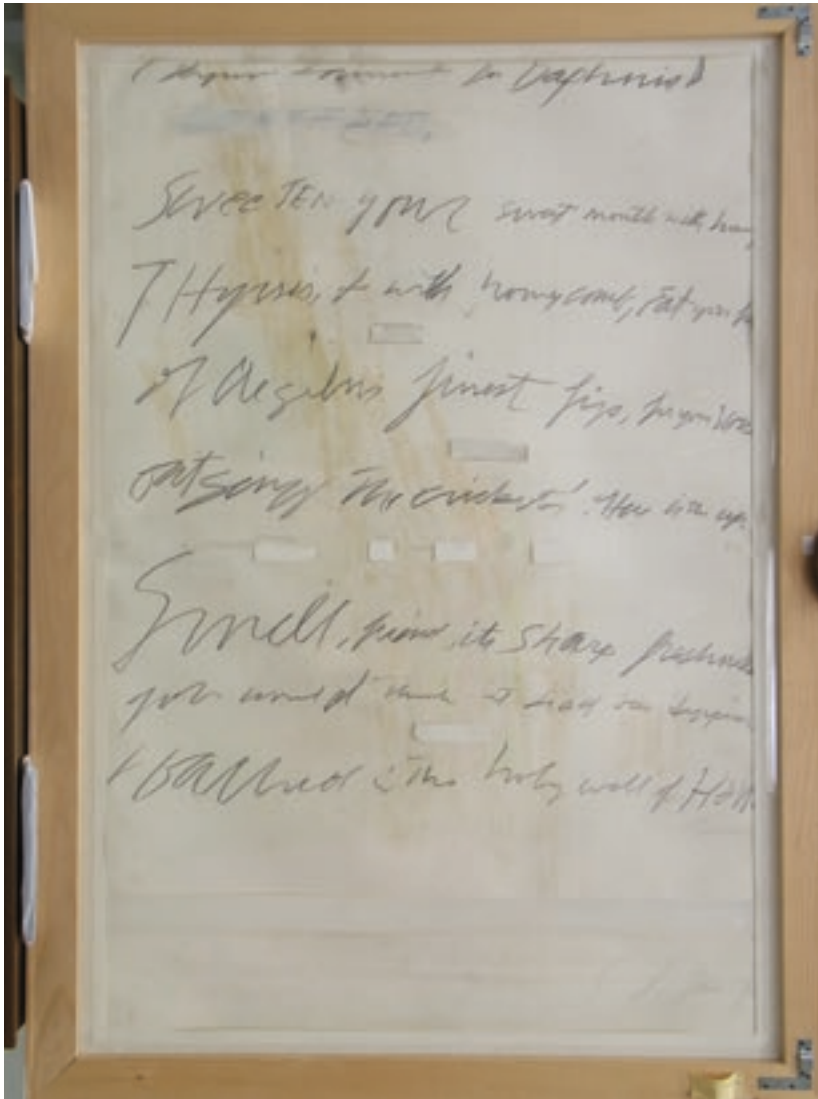
“(Thyrsis lament for Daphnis)
 Sweeten your sweet mouth with honey
 Thyrsis with honeycomb. Eat you full
 of Aegilus finest figs, for your voice
 outsing the cickits [*sic*]. Here ist [*sic*] this cup.
 Smell, find its sharp freshness
 You would think it had been tripped
 and bathed in the holy well of Hora.”

– The transcription of the back of *Bacchanalia—Fall* (5 days in October) from 1977 (Museum Brandhorst, UAB 456) reads (cf. ill. 7):

(Thyrsis Lament for Daphnis)
 GOATHERD: [half-canceled script]
 SweetEn your sweet mouth with honey
 THyrsis, + with honeycomb, Eat your fill
 of Aegilus finest figs, for your voice
 outsing The cricket's. Here is the cup.
 Smell, friend, its sharp freshness
 you would think it had been dipped
 + bathed in The holy well of Hours.

(We thank Dr. Nina Schleif and the restorer Bianca Albrecht of the Museum Brandhorst for her kind help and for sending two images; email of 14 June 2013; also for permission to include one of the images in the present volume).
 6 YL VI 174.

7 In Holden's translation *your fill* (rather than *you full*) is read here, cf. Holden 1974, 51.



7 Back of Cy Twombly's *Bacchanalia—Fall (5 days in October)*, Rome, 1977, lead pencil on paper, 101.2 × 150.9 cm, UAB 456, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich, Udo and Anette Brandhorst Foundation, Museum Brandhorst

outsings the crickets.⁸ [[Here is the cup:]]
Smell friend, its sharp freshness

These are lines 146–149 at the end of Theocritus' *Idyll* 1. On the reverse of the sheet in the *Bacchanalia* series, mentioned above, the same quotation is continued to line 150:

You would think it had been dipped⁹
And bathed in the holy well of Hours.¹⁰

The theme mentioned in the cancelled title 'Thyrsis' Lament for Daphnis', and the poetry of Theocritus as a whole, occupied Cy Twombly frequently in this period. It is reflected in various of his works in different ways.

A work from 1976 bears the title *Thyrsis' Lament for Daphnis*. In that three-part work, lines that in Theocritus appear shortly before the verses in our triptych, but likewise towards the end of this lament, namely lines 131–136, are inscribed in the central part of this three-part work, the first part of which displays in the same words the statement of the content, "Thyrsis' Lament for Daphnis".¹¹

Richard Leeman in his 1999 Paris doctoral dissertation *Cy Twombly. Peindre, dessiner, écrire*, which has also been published in English in 2005 under the title *Cy Twombly. To paint, to draw, to write*, has pointed out not

8 By *crickets* is meant *cricket's*, thus also in Holden, *ibid*.

9 The passage in full in Holden, *ibid.*:

"GOATHERD

Sweeten your sweet mouth with honey,
Thyrsis, and with honeycomb. Eat your fill
of Aegilus' finest figs, for your voice
outsings the cricket's. Here is the cup:
smell, friend, its sharp freshness –
you would think it had been dipped
and bathed in the holy well of Hours."

10 In place of *Hora* the translation of Holden reads *Hours*.

11 *Untitled*, 3 parts (1976), YL VI 200: Part 1: "THYRSIS' LAMENT FOR DAPHNIS"; *ibid*. Part 2: "CeASE MUSES Cease my Country SONG / 'MAY violets grow on thistles, / may they grow on thorns! / May narcissus grow on Juniper! / the world m[[ust]] change / DAPHnis dies! Pears grow on pine trees / Now the deer must chase the hounds / + the screech owl's song sound sweeter / than the nightgales!'" Further, one should note *Idilli*, 3 part (1976), YL VI 197: "THYRSIS / I AM THYRSIS / of ETNa blessed with a / tuneful Voice".

only a further quotation by Twombly of two lines from Theocritus' *Idyll* 5 in an untitled work from 1976, but also the Latin quotation of a line from Virgil's Second Bucolic (or Eclogue) in Twombly's *Idilion* of 1976.¹² It is known that the *Bucolics* of Virgil were composed on the model of the *Bucolics* of Theocritus. All the same, Leeman suspects that it is likely Twombly did not take this quotation directly from Virgil and add it to his *Idilion*, but that he had found the quotation in a commentary note on Virgil's allusions, at the start of the "Aegloga duedecima" (line 11) of *The Shepherdes Calender*, which the Elizabethan poet Edmund Spenser published anonymously in 1559. For Twombly not only dedicated to Spenser the group of works to which the *Idilion* belongs, but also—and notably in the year 1977—he had made two illustrations for each of the 12 Eclogues of Spenser, each of which stands for a month of the year.¹³

This lively interest of Twombly offers reason enough to consider Theocritus, his poetry, and the context of the lines of Theocritus quoted in *Thyrsis*.

Theocritus was from Syracuse on Sicily and was active as a poet between the 280s and the mid-third century BC. He was in contact with important Alexandrian poets such as Asclepiades of Samos and Philitas of Cos. His poems seem to be linked to lines by Poseidippus, Apollonius, and even Callimachus through reciprocal allusions. It is thus not mere chance that only some of the poems of Theocritus belong to the setting of the West, and then primarily in largely Greek-speaking Sicily, whereas another part of his work is set in the East, in Alexandria, which from the start of the third century BC was regarded as a cultural metropolis.

Of the corpus of 30 poems transmitted under Theocritus' name, all of which are without distinction called *Eidyllia* in the ancient scholia, around 22 should be regarded as authentic; all the texts in the corpus are in hexameter verse. However, they differ from the epic tradition associated with this meter through their brevity. With their sometimes complicated allusions and their hitherto unheard-of linguistic phenomena, which even draw on subliterate spheres, they match not only the Hellenistic poetic ideal of refined, polished, short poems full of allusions, but also correspond to the realism in content that was also cultivated in that era.

12 Virg. ecl. 2, 33; cf. Leeman 2005, 237 [References in the present paper are to the German edition]. His preceding reference to the Thirteenth Eclogue of Virgil should be corrected, however. The reference should be to the third poem of the *Eclogues*, which comprise ten eclogues in total.

13 Cf. YL VII 5–6, or Calender 1985.

The Theocritean Corpus, transmitted via medieval copies, offers not only much that is inauthentic, but also presents only an excerpt from the poet's literary output, which is known to have been much more extensive. Without any introductory verses by the author himself, we can only speculate about the arrangement and form in which he published his poems in his own lifetime. The existing corpus, admittedly, shows us how creatively and unpredictably the poet applied the general principles and demands of Hellenistic poetics, as sketched above, in individual cases. For that reason it is also difficult to find a common denominator for the genre of the surviving poems. Some, but by no means all, the poems are in dialog form and seem to take their orientation from the mime, a widespread type of short theater play popular throughout antiquity which included elements of improvisation, and consequently was seldom given a literary treatment and written form—the mime's contents came close to what is today called 'sketches'. However, mime influenced only some of the poems of the corpus, whereas others transform it in innovative directions, or have nothing to do with it at all. Likewise the bucolic (or pastoral) material, a type of Hellenistic 'light' literary form, is found in many, but again not all, of the transmitted poems of Theocritus.

Overall, the surviving Theocritean poems as a whole give the impression of a poet constantly striving for unexpected innovations. Some of these literary innovations remained one-day wonders, others were from time to time picked up again in later periods, while yet others, such as the pastoral creation of a peaceful *locus amoenus* among the herdsmen, seemingly untouched by the troubles of the world outside, developed into a genre of poetry that, beginning with Virgil's *Eclogues*, lived on into the poetry, music, and art of the modern period. Theocritus, like many authors and aspects of Hellenism as a whole, is thus especially well suited to be studied in the light of the questions central to the researches of the Morphomata Center, though in the context of the present contribution and its specific themes this aspect will have to remain just a hint.

For the understanding of Cy Twombly's *Thyrsis* triptych, on the other hand, a look at the content of Theocritus' *Idyll* 1 is necessary. In the mid-day heat the shepherd Thyrsis and an unnamed Goatherd—we should note the specialization in activities—pay each other mutual compliments for their song and flute-playing respectively. As the Goatherd cannot accede to Thyrsis' wish for flute music in the midday stillness, which is controlled by Pan, he coaxes Thyrsis with the prospect of the gift of a pregnant goat and a wooden beaker, which is described at length for its

artistic decoration—a typically Hellenistic ecphrasis, i.e. a change of medium, though admittedly Twombly does not pick it up as such¹⁴—to sing the song of the sad fate of the herdsman Daphnis, with which Thyrsis had done well in a competition in pastoral song. It should be stressed that there was no literary pastoral before Theocritus. Theocritus had hence created something new through this type of poetry. Yet in his fiction he suggests in an elegant way, through the idea that there was already an established competition in pastoral poetry, even featuring a competitor who had traveled from a Greek colony in North Africa to Sicily, that his pastoral poems were a genre that was even celebrated as such in official competitions, of which he sets up the lamented, because deceased, shepherd Daphnis as founder.

Let us return to the poem. Thyrsis grants the Goatherd's wish and delivers a repeat of his victorious song. This begins with a verse that invokes the Muses, which subsequently returns like a refrain and at the end, slightly altered, introduces the close of the poem.

Directly after the first use of this invocation of the Muses, there follows the line that Twombly quotes in the central panel of the triptych (Theocr. 1, 65):

Θύρσις ὅδ' ὥξ Αἴτνας, καὶ Θύρσιδος ἀδέα φωνά.

A strictly literal translation would be: 'Thyrsis is this one here, he from the region of Etna, and Thyrsis' is the sweet-sounding voice'. However, given that Thyrsis himself speaks this verse, it is entirely reasonable to change this to the first person, as in the translation used by Twombly, and to translate it as 'I am Thyrsis of Etna, blessed with a tuneful voice'.

To infer a special interpretive intention from these differences in the English translation chosen seems to me far too bold. Lambert gave a special significance to the first-person form that appears in Cy Twombly's triptych, to the effect that the artist even identified himself with Thyrsis.¹⁵ I do not wish to dismiss as a general possibility that the artist, through his engagement with the lines that Theocritus gave to a character called Thyrsis, could have to some degree have identified with this singer of pastoral songs. However, I wish to cast doubt on the idea that the 'I' of the English text, which is yielded unproblematically by the Greek source

¹⁴ At the least, the switch from painting to music perceived by Göricke could be interpreted as an analogy (as kindly suggested by Thierry Greub).

¹⁵ YL VI 174.

text, could indicate such an identification. For the Greek text itself is seen by modern commentators like Gow¹⁶ and Hunter¹⁷ as a *sphragis*, that is, a kind of “seal” with which traditionally the author of an ancient poem, by weaving into it some hard-to-imitate artistic element, made himself unmistakably recognizable, and so tried to protect his work against false claims or attributions of authorship—a scenario that was always a potential threat in the era before print. With the ancient *sphragis* an identification is already made clear enough, so we cannot derive from it any further attempts at identification on the part of the modern artist. To question Twombly about the content here would be intriguing, but unfortunately not possible. We must regard any such suggestions, and the further speculations that may be built on them, therefore, as no more than suggestions.

The song sung by Thyrsis laments the death of Daphnis, whose name is linked by other sources¹⁸ (probably because of this Theocritean fiction) with the invention of pastoral poetry, and ends with the demand for the gifts that had been promised. The enthusiastic Goatherd begins with the words quoted in English translation in the right panel of the triptych:

Sweeten your sweet mouth with [[honey,]]
 THYRSIS with honeycomb. [[Eat your fill]]
 of Aegilus finest figs

The wish picks up the traditional idea that poets, whose language is distinguished by special sweetness, are fed by bees.¹⁹ The Goatherd expands this to include the famously tasty figs from the Attic district of Aegilus. In a metaphor appropriate to his own rural world, Thyrsis is equated to the highest poets.

The justification that follows, too, fits into the narrow imaginative world of a herdsman:

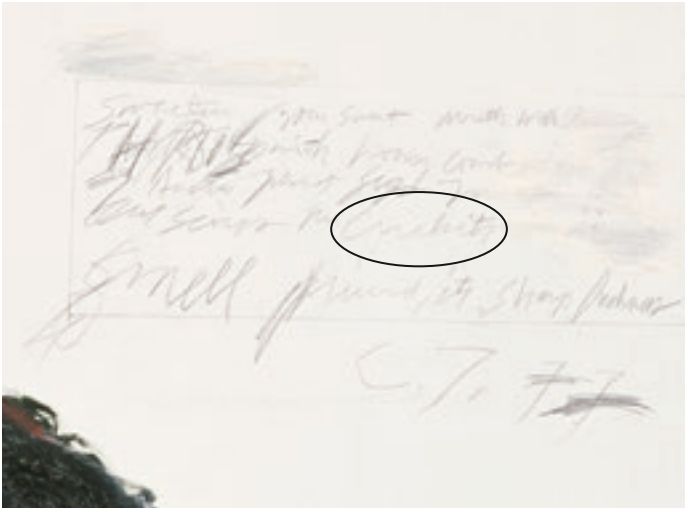
f[[or your voice]]
 outsings the crickets.

16 Andrew S.F. Gow: *Theocritus*. Vol. II. Commentary etc. Cambridge 1950, 17 (on Theocr. 1, 65).

17 Richard L. Hunter (ed. comm.): *Theocritus. A Selection. Idylls 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 11 and 13*. Cambridge 1999, 87.

18 On these cf. *ibid.*, 61–68.

19 Cf. Gow, *op. cit.*, on Theocr. 1, 146; Hunter, *op. cit.*, on Theocr. 1, 146–148.



8 'circuits' or 'crickets'?

According to this, the song of Thyrsis puts in the shade even the cicadas, representatives of the grasshopper family called in English 'crickets' as well as 'cicadas,' which in the Mediterranean area chirp without end through the evening (ill. 8).

The Greek text and English translations of this passage make it plausible that in Cy Twombly the word written with the phonetically identical letter -i- should be read as 'crickets' and not, as it has been transcribed in the art historical research literature to date, 'circuits'.²⁰ The phrase would anyway be meaningless if it were read as 'for your voice outsings the circuits'.

The difficult process of reading Twombly's scribbles can thus register a small advance here. Unfortunately the often expensive catalogs with Twombly's exhibited or collected works are frequently uninformative as regards the texts that appear in the pictures, and many of the text transcriptions, which are often incomplete, are even erroneous. The oeuvre of Cy Twombly, who in his works refers to texts and includes excerpts from them, thus demands philological study too.

²⁰ In the catalog of the exhibition *Twombly and Poussin* in 2011 the following version appears: "Sweeten your sweet mouth with honey Thyrsis with honey comb. Eat you full of Aegilus finest figs, for your voice outsings the circuits. Here is the cup. Smell, find its sharp freshness. You would think it had been tripped and bathed in the holy well of Hora." (Dulwich 2011, 144).

The next verses which (as mentioned) are also written on the back of a sheet of Twombly's *Bacchanalia*, though with an additional line from Theocritus, refer in Theocritus to the gift of the carved beaker that was offered at the start by the Goatherd as a prize for the song. According to the Goatherd's account it still smells very fresh, as if it had been dipped in the spring of the Hours—here mentioned for the first time in Greek poetry—who in their function as goddesses of the seasons are also the symbol of youthful attraction.²¹

[[Here is the cup:]]

Smell friend, its sharp freshness

In the reading of this line, too, thanks to a suggestion by my colleague Annemarie Ambühl, it has been possible to make an improvement in the reading, by recognizing, instead of the word 'find' which until now has always been recorded, rather the address—which also appears explicitly in the Greek text—'friend' (ill. 9).²²

To complete the line of thought, we may add here the further line of the idyll that is written out only in the *Bacchanalia*:

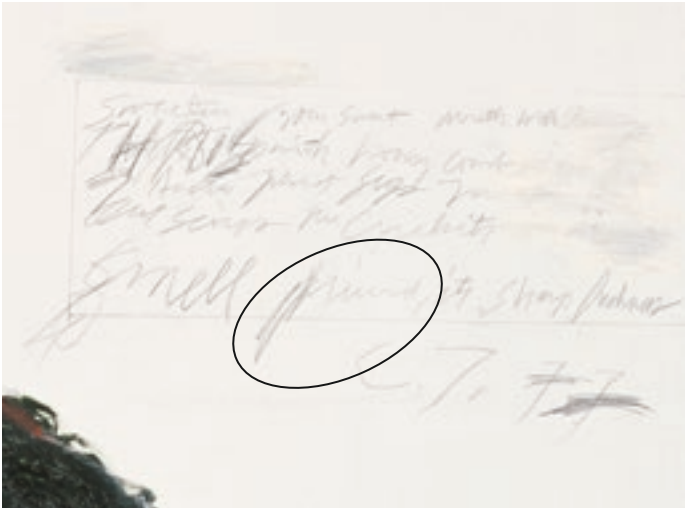
You would think it had been dipped
And bathed in the holy well of Hours.

For the viewer of the Twombly triptych, these details of Theocritus are background information necessary for the understanding of the text excerpts used in the picture, but the viewer would only on the basis of wide and detailed knowledge be able to decipher them and recognize that the line quoted in the central panel marks the start of the recitation by Thyrsis about the death of Daphnis in Theocritus' first Idyll, and that the section reproduced in the right panel contains the praise by the listening Goatherd which follows Thyrsis' recitation of his lament for Daphnis.

Likewise, it is only with a knowledge of the Theocritean model that the list on the left panel of the triptych can be understood both in its content and in the paired structure, which doubtless had a significance for Twombly, as his selection criteria outlined above suggest.

21 Cf. on this the essay by Jan Bremmer: The Birth of the Personified Seasons (*Horai*) in Archaic and Classical Greece. In: Thierry Greub: *Das Bild der Jahreszeiten im Wandel der Kulturen und Zeiten* (Morphomata, vol. 7). Munich 2013, 161–178.

22 Thus also in Holden's translation.



9 'find' or 'friend'?

However, Cy Twombly, in contrast to the Hellenistic poets before their demanding and highly educated public, could not take for granted such knowledge in the reception of his works. Evidently he did not want this, either, for he muffled his quotation—already hard to decipher—in the right panel of the triptych by subsequently painting over it (ill. 10).

It may be assumed that for the artist the quotations, names, and their written execution served as a merely emotional evocation of an ancient Greek, Mediterranean rural world.

As well as the rural sphere evoked by *GOATHERD*, there may also be classicizing, de-familiarizing elements in the writing of the capital 'A' in the form of a Greek letter Delta, as it appears throughout his capital letters on the left panel of the triptych.²³ This letter-form is found in Twombly frequently in relation to the ancient world, specifically in works related directly to Greek matters (ill. 11; cf. pp. 159–177, ill. 8–16). However, one should point out a counter-example, such as in *Apollo and the Artist* (cf. p. 66, ill. 7).

Yet, as strict and finicky consistency is surely something entirely foreign to the artist Cy Twombly, this counter-example can surely not be cited against the proposed interpretation, but rather just confirms—like

²³ See above, ill. 2.



10 Right panel of Cy Twombly's *Thyrsis*: over-painted right part of the quotation

countless other examples—that Twombly normally wrote an ‘A’ in the usual Latin form.

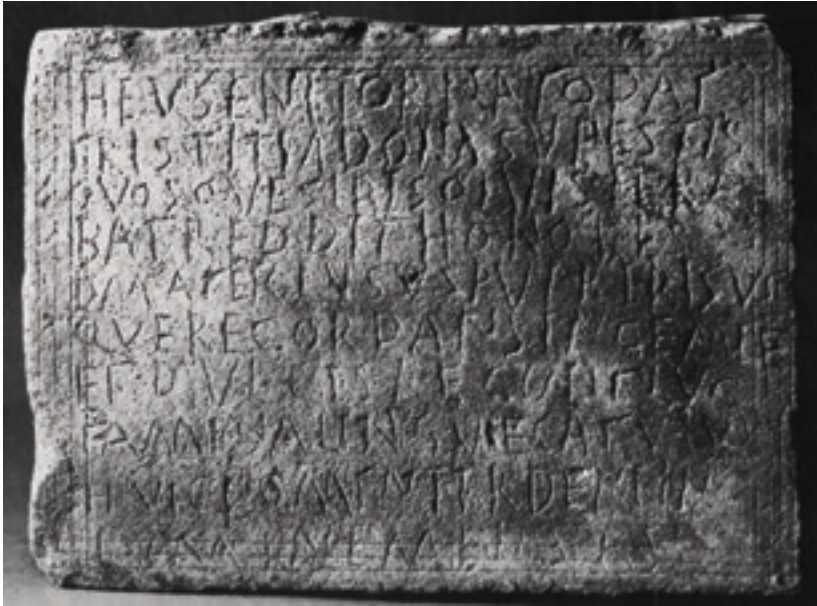
Ancient modes of representation seem also to be evoked by the framing of the writing of the right panel of the triptych, a framing that is rare for Twombly and hence probably meaningful, and one that in its execution stands in sharp contrast to the writing itself. In countless ancient inscriptions we find such a framing. Twombly's mannerism of breaking out of the pre-existing frame is also found already on ancient predecessors, such as a late antique funerary inscription from Cologne (ill. 12).²⁴

The verses composed for the little child whose gravestone this is undoubtedly have a poetic quality. Yet the lines inscribed on the stone in irregular script, without reference to the verse structure, with unorthodox spelling and disfiguring mistakes, run over across the cleanly drawn frame that had been provided beforehand.

24 Brigitte and Hartmut Galsterer: *Die römischen Steininschriften aus Köln* (I.Köln²). Ext. ed., Mainz 2010 (1975), no. 755, which, however, did not adopt the illuminating improvements to the text by Wolfgang Dieter Lebek in *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 45 (1982), 88–90.



11 Cy Twombly: *Anabasis*, Rome, November 20, 1983, oil stick, oil paint, wax crayon, lead pencil, 100 × 70 cm, Collection Cy Twombly Foundation



12 Late antique funerary inscription, Cologne (I.Köln² 755)

At the end of these elucidations one will ask oneself how intensively Cy Twombly had reflected on the art form alluded to in this triptych and other works, namely Hellenistic poetry. If one wishes to assume an engagement with the Hellenistic poetic program, then Twombly would have intentionally suspended the foundational principles of Hellenistic poetry and art: instead of the small form he would have chosen the large scale, replaced artful polishing with aesthetically unflattering carefreeness, and would have addressed his work not to an initiated circle of connoisseurs of the allusions they contain, but to a public that was probably neither able nor willing to make much of the ancient texts and their associations.

For that very reason, it should be assumed that in Twombly the ancient tradition comes alive not as a revolt against artistic principles that are marked as Hellenistic, but in the adaptation of the emotional world, charged with symbols, of the pastoral *locus amoenus* poetry of the modern era. Via this modern poetry, Twombly was inspired to an engagement with the pastoral poetry of Theocritus, on the basis of an English translation newly published in 1974 by Holden.

This explains which aspects of the Hellenistic poetry of Theocritus found their way into Twombly's work, and which did not. Finally, from

Theocritus' oeuvre, Twombly adopted and fashioned above all the pastoral idylls. Will this re-shaping, or at least aspects of it, lead, as *morphomata*²⁵ of a Theocritean pastoral translated into visual art, will this lead to the genesis of a new genre, as once happened with Theocritus? Time will tell.

ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

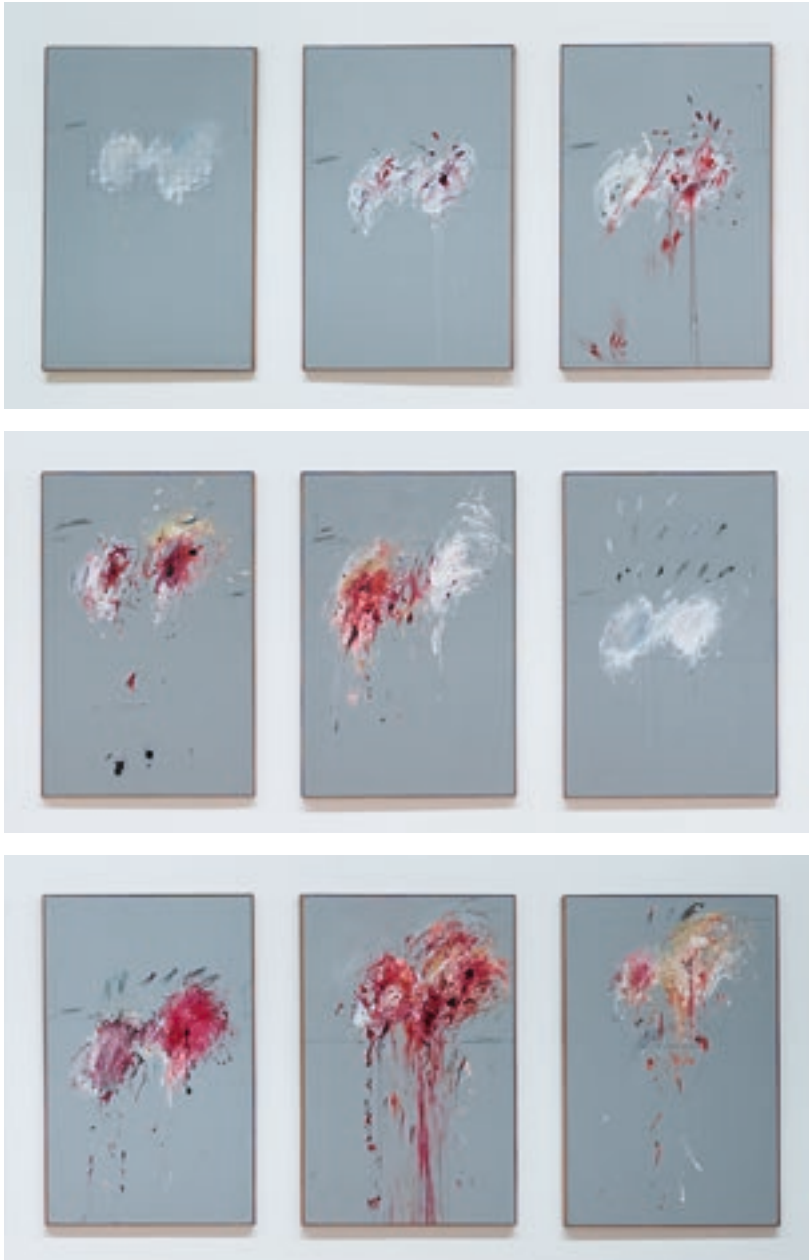
All works by Cy Twombly: © Cy Twombly Foundation, New York / Rome
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7 By kind consent of Bianca Albrecht, UAB 456, Udo and Anette Brandhorst Foundation, Foto: Bianca Albrecht, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, © Cy Twombly Foundation.

12 I.Köln² 755.

25 Cf. on the term the author's Die antike Verwendung des Begriffs *mórphoma*. In: Günter Blamberger / Dietrich Boschung (ed.): *Morphomata. Kulturelle Figurationen: Genese, Dynamik und Medialität* (Morphomata, vol. 1). Munich 2011, 91–109.



1.1-9 Cy Twombly: *Nine Discourses on Commodus*, Rome, 1963, 9 parts, oil paint, wax crayon, lead pencil on industrially primed gray canvas, each c. 204 × 134 cm, Bilbao, Guggenheim Bilbao Museoa

STEFAN PRIWITZER

NINE DISCOURSES ON COMMODUS

“There isn’t anything to the paintings.”¹ This disparaging criticism was Donald Judd’s comment on the first exhibition of the cycle *Nine Discourses on Commodus*² by Cy Twombly in 1964 at the Leo Castelli Gallery in New York.³ The cycle, which was in private ownership,⁴ was seen in public one more time in an exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York in 1979, but there too the Commodus series never really convinced the critics.⁵ It was then nearly 30 years before the work became permanently accessible to the public through its purchase by the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao in 2007⁶ (ills. 1.1–9).⁷ The

1 Donald Judd: Cy Twombly. In: *Arts Magazine* 38, 9 (1964), 38. Among other things, this quotation served as a provocative advertisement for the exhibition “Turner—Monet—Twombly. Later Paintings” (11.02.–28.05.2012, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart).

2 HB II 156; <http://www.guggenheim-bilbao.es/en/works/nine-discourses-on-commodus/> (25.06.2016).

3 For the background reasons for the negative reception of the exhibit, which included the way the pictures were hung without taking their sequence into account, cf. Cullinan 2009, 103 f.

4 On the ownership of the work after the initial exhibition see *ibid.*, 108 f., n. 56.

5 Cf. Majorie Welish: A Discourse on Commodus. In: *Art in America* 67 (1979), 81: “[...] it is more interesting than *Nine Discourses on Commodus*, 1963, a series in which one saw the rival principles of color and line narrowly and self-consciously upheld.” Cf. the review of the exhibition by John Russell in the *New York Times* of April 13, 1979.

6 Cf. <http://prensa.guggenheim-bilbao.es/en/press-releases/acquisitions/adquisicion-nueve-discursos-sobre-comodo-de-cy-twombly-2/> (25.06.2016).

7 Thierry Greub deserves great thanks for much information during the work on this paper. The contributions to the discussion by the participants in the conference were also helpful.—Orla Mulholland not only made a more than

very negative assessment on its first two showings has now turned, but the Commodus cycle—not least on account of its inaccessibility⁸—has been rather neglected in research. In retrospect the artist himself took a downright euphoric view of the damning response in 1964, for its effect on him personally: “[...] the Commodus episode made him ‘the happiest painter around, for a couple of years: no one gave a damn what I did.’”⁹

The cycle takes its name from the Emperor Commodus, who ruled as Roman emperor in AD 180–192. If the Emperor Commodus today evokes any associations, then they are for the most part prompted by Ridley Scott’s film *Gladiator* (2000), in which he has the role of the sinister opponent to the hero Maximus;¹⁰ many may perhaps also know the famous portrait bust of Commodus in the Capitoline Museums, which portrays him as Hercules.¹¹

In what follows Commodus, and the image of him drawn by the ancient sources, will first be presented. A second part of the essay then aims to address the question of why Twombly picked specifically the Emperor Commodus as his theme. It is known that Twombly took inspiration both from artistic and from literary works, as was stressed by Thierry Greub in his paper in Stuttgart on the occasion of the exhibition “Turner—Monet—Twombly. Later Paintings”.¹² A quotation from Twombly underlines this: “Art comes from art.”¹³ In an interview with Nicholas Serota in 2007 Twombly made a very similar comment: “I like something to jumpstart me—usually a place or a literary reference or an event that took place, to start me off. To give me clarity or energy.”¹⁴

appropriate translation, but also made very useful observations.—Juliane Kerkehecker (Oxford) improved the text in numerous passages.

⁸ Cf. Cullinan 2009, 105 with n. 63.

⁹ Kirk Varnedoe in: New York 1994, 39.

¹⁰ <http://www.imdb.de/title/tt0172495/> (25.06.2016).

¹¹ Palazzo dei Conservatori, Inv. 1120 (http://www.museicapitolini.org/collezioni/percorsi_per_sale/museo_del_palazzo_dei_conservatori/sale_degli_hortilamiani/busto_di_commodo_come_ercole [25.06.2016]). Cf. Cristina De Ranieri: *Renovatio temporum e “rifondazione di Roma” nell’ideologia politica e religiosa di Commodo*. In: *SCO* 45 (1995), 329–368 and Ralf von den Hoff: *Commodus als Hercules*. In: Luca Giuliani (ed.): *Meisterwerke der antiken Kunst*. Munich 2005, 114–135.

¹² Cf. Greub 2012 (lecture delivered at the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart on 16 February 2012).

¹³ Kazanjian 1994.

¹⁴ London 2008, 50. Cf. a comment by Twombly in White 1994, 106: “‘Influence’

Finally, various approaches to the interpretation of the nine paintings of the series will be presented, in order to judge how much 'Commodus' is really present in the pictures.

THE EMPEROR COMMODUS

Commodus was the son of the much better known Emperor Marcus Aurelius, who ruled the Roman empire in AD 161–181. The reign of Marcus Aurelius was marked by wars lasting many years (thus the famous equestrian statue of him on the Capitol probably portrays him as victor over the Orient¹⁵), but above all by his autobiographical text *Meditations*, on account of which he is regarded as the philosopher on the imperial throne, or philosopher-emperor; for ancient authors he was the very model of the ideal emperor, primarily for his respectful treatment of the senators, the leading elite of the Roman empire.¹⁶ Commodus, who became sole ruler at the age of only 18, is said to have been the exact opposite of his father, a point on which the three main ancient sources for his reign agree.¹⁷ These are Cassius Dio, a senator from the Greek-speaking East of the empire, who was himself an eye-witness to the end of Commodus' reign; just under a generation later, Herodian, whose work was likewise written in Greek, and who was probably more of an armchair historian (he was only briefly in Rome, if at all); and finally the *Historia Augusta*, a collection of imperial biographies by an unknown author. All three of these authors paint a damning picture of Commodus' regime:¹⁸ First there is the suspicion that he had some involvement in the death of his father, Marcus Aurelius.¹⁹ Next, Commodus abandons the war on the Danube that his father had waged for over ten years, because he couldn't

is not a dirty word. I'm influenced by everything I see—a painting but also a rush of sky."

15 Cf. Johannes Bergemann: Marc Aurel als Orientsieger? Noch einmal zur Ikonographie der Reiterstatue auf dem Kapitol in Rom. In: *AMIT* 24 (1991), 135–140.

16 Hist. Aug. Aur. 10, 2.

17 There is a brief overview with further bibliography in Stefan Priwitzer: *Faustina minor – Ehefrau eines Idealkaisers und Mutter eines Tyrannen. Quellenkritische Untersuchungen zum dynastischen Potential, zur Darstellung und zu Handlungsspielräumen von Kaiserfrauen im Prinzipat*. Bonn 2009, 7–14.

18 In detail on this cf. *ibid.*, 116–158.

19 D.C. 71 [72], 33, 4² [Xiph.].

be bothered with the duties of a Roman emperor and preferred to enjoy the luxury of the capital Rome.²⁰ Due to his extravagant and expensive lifestyle,²¹ and because he surrounded himself with people whom he could only bind to himself by gifts of money, while these 'friends' also helped themselves to his money or just embezzled it,²² Commodus quickly ran into financial difficulties. The shortfalls in the imperial treasury were repeatedly filled by enforced legacies or by murdering the rich, and by selling public offices and court decisions.²³ This style of 'governance' led to conspiracies and assassination attempts;²⁴ but aggrieved female members of his family²⁵ or itinerant robbers²⁶ also planned attacks on Commodus. The ancient authors saw this as proof that the emperor had totally lost control of the reins of power, even within his own family. The numerous conspiracies, some from among his closest associates, led Commodus into a paranoid state of anxiety, and he now had people executed on the slightest suspicion;²⁷ he descended into a killing spree to which many senators fell victim.²⁸ Commodus himself was assassinated at just 31 years of age (as will be discussed in detail later).²⁹

The standard by which Commodus measured his actions was not law, or morals and decency, but personal gratification: he surrounded himself with flatterers, freedmen, and lowlives such as jesters, actors, and chariot-racers;³⁰ he paid more honor to his lovers than to the senators.³¹ Commo-

20 Hdn. 1, 6; Hist. Aug. Comm. 3, 5. The allegations made against Commodus will be reported in what follows as direct statements; this should not be taken as any kind of evaluation of the truth of the accusations.

21 Hist. Aug. Comm. 3, 7; D.C. 72 [73], 16, 1–2 [Xiph.].

22 D.C. 72 [73], 12, 4 [Xiph.].

23 D.C. 72 [73], 12, 3–4; 16 [Xiph.]; Hdn. 1, 8, 8; 1, 17, 2; Hist. Aug. Comm. 5, 12–14; 6, 9–10; 7, 8; 14, 4–7; 19, 5 f.

24 Perennis: Hdn. 1, 9, 1 and 7–10; Hist. Aug. Comm. 6, 1–2; Cleander: D.C. 72 [73], 10, 2 [Exc. Val.]; 13 [Xiph.]; Hist. Aug. Comm. 6, 5; 6, 8; 7, 1; Hdn. 1, 12, 3.

25 Commodus' sister Lucilla: D.C. 72 [73], 4, 5 [Xiph.]; Hdn. 1, 8, 3–6; cf. Hist. Aug. Comm. 4, 1–3.

26 Hdn. 1, 10–11.

27 Hist. Aug. Comm. 10, 7 with further examples.

28 After his death, Commodus is said to have been called *carnifex senatus*, the "slaughterer of the Senate" (Hist. Aug. Comm. 18, 4; 19, 2).

29 Hdn. 1, 16, 2–17, 11; cf. D.C. 72 [73], 22, 2–5 [Xiph.].

30 Hdn. 1, 13, 8; cf. Hist. Aug. Comm. 8, 4.

31 It was expected of the emperor that he would choose his friends according to their dignity, cf. Peter Astbury Brunt: The Emperor's Choice of Amici. In: Peter

Commodus took pleasure in carrying out humiliations and mistreatment,³² but he himself was very sensitive to criticism or mockery.³³ To fulfill his sexual desires there was no abomination from which he shrank;³⁴ basically, no part of Commodus' body was unstained, according to the *Historia Augusta*.³⁵ Commodus was alleged to have incestuously raped his sisters and an aunt of his father; he was also said to have given his mother's name to one of his mistresses, with the implication that there had earlier been an incestuous relationship.³⁶ Commodus even set up a brothel within the imperial palace in which freeborn Roman women had to offer themselves to the clients.³⁷

In the sphere of religion Commodus stood out for his lack of respect and for elevating himself among the gods.³⁸ He looted sanctuaries and tainted them through sexual debauchery and shedding human blood.³⁹ Especially marked in Commodus is the identification with Hercules,⁴⁰ which is impressively manifested in the famous portrait bust, already mentioned, in the Capitoline Museums. For the ancient authors the nadir of Commodus' reign was the emperor's performance as animal fighter and gladiator in the Colosseum, which Cassius Dio himself saw as a spectator.⁴¹

TWOMBLY'S "JUMPSTART"⁴²

The most common interpretation of the Commodus cycle, which will be discussed in more detail, is based on this representation of Commodus as tyrant. However, none of the modern interpreters has asked where Twombly found his knowledge of Commodus: it is evidently assumed

Kneissl / Volker Losemann (ed.): *Alte Geschichte und Wissenschaftsgeschichte. Festschrift für Karl Christ zum 65. Geburtstag*. Darmstadt 1998, 39–56.

32 D.C. 72 [73], 20, 3 [Xiph.]; Hist. Aug. Comm. 5, 5; 9, 5–6; 10, 3; 11, 2.

33 Hist. Aug. Comm. 3, 4; 10, 2.

34 Hist. Aug. Comm. 5, 4 u. 8; 10, 9.

35 Hist. Aug. Comm. 5, 11.

36 Hist. Aug. Comm. 5, 8.

37 Hist. Aug. Comm. 2, 7–8.

38 D.C. 72 [73], 17, 3; 19, 4 [both Xiph.].

39 Hist. Aug. Comm. 11, 6; 9, 5 f.; 19, 4.

40 D.C. 72 [73] 15, 2 f.; Hist. Aug. Comm. 8, 5. Cf. coins: RIC III no. 560, p. 430; no. 570, p. 431. BMC Emp. IV 741–742 no. 282–284; 827 no. 655–656, † and ‡; 828 no. 662–663 and †.

41 D.C. 72 [73], 18–21 [Xiph.]. Cf. Hdn. 1, 15, 1–8; Hist. Aug. Comm. 12, 12–13, 4.

42 Cf. above n. 14.

that the image of the tyrant in the written sources is general knowledge (and would hence also be known to the viewer⁴³). A study of Twombly's collection of books would be fascinating.⁴⁴ In connection with other works by Twombly we know that he had read works by classical authors, so this could be true in our example too: all three sources were available in English translation in the 1960s.⁴⁵ Important here is whether he had read all three or just one of them,⁴⁶ because, while the ancient authors agree in their essentially negative attitude to Commodus, they differ on the question of whether he was born with all these negative qualities or had only developed into a monster over time.⁴⁷ The author of the *Historia Augusta* regards Commodus as primarily a person of bad character.⁴⁸ The negative predispositions were so strong that they could not be improved by either his father's doctrines or instruction by important teachers.⁴⁹ Cassius Dio and Herodian, on the other hand, take the view that Commodus was by nature not generally worse than any other person, but that he had gradually fallen under the negative influence of the environment he had chosen

43 Cf. Stemmrich 2009, 82.

44 The collection of books—at least from the available photographs of his studio—probably consisted of numerous stacks of books, cf. Klaus-Peter Busse: *o. T. Über Cy Twombly*. Oberhausen 2012, 218. Thierry Greub kindly made available to me a list of the books located in Gaeta, but probably these were not all the books in Twombly's possession.

45 Cassius Dio: *Roman History: in nine volumes*, with an English transl. by Earnest Cary on the basis of the version of Herbert Baldwin Foster (Loeb classical library), London 1914–1927 (numerous reimpressions); Herodian of Antioch's *History of the Roman Empire: From the Death of Marcus Aurelius to the Accession of Gordian III*, transl. from the Greek by Edward C. Echols, Berkeley 1961; *The Scriptores historiae Augustae: in 3 volumes*, with an English transl. by David Magie (Loeb classical library), London 1921–1933 (numerous reimpressions). In the list of books in Gaeta there is a translation of the *Historia Augusta (Lives of the later Caesars)* [Penguin Classics], transl. by Anthony Birley, reprint, which contains the biography of Commodus, but was published only in 1976. Perhaps Twombly had possessed another, older translation of the *Historia Augusta*, which was replaced with the 1976 edition.

46 Due to the fragmentary state of preservation of the books concerning the reign of Commodus, it is rather unlikely that Twombly would have used Cassius Dio as his primary or only source. In the list of ancient sources on Commodus, Herodian is forgotten by Cullinan 2009, 106 n. 8.

47 In detail cf. Priwitzer 2009, op. cit., 116 f.

48 Hist. Aug. Comm. 1, 7.

49 Hist. Aug. Comm. 1, 5.

for himself.⁵⁰ Herodian lets the reader experience a series of attacks on Commodus from his point of view, and so makes the emperor's ever-rising paranoia and distrust, and the pathological behavior that follow seem essentially 'plausible'.⁵¹

Even if Twombly 'only' read modern historical or popular accounts of Commodus or of the Roman empire in general, almost all of them follow the same principle as the ancient sources and present Commodus as mentally ill and ruling by violence.⁵² In historical research on the ancient world, rulers whom the sources present in this extremely negative way were (and are) usually interpreted simply as disturbed personalities or as victims of the "madness of the Caesars" (*Caesarenwahnsinn*).⁵³ Specific illnesses have been cited to explain and excuse their behavior, by long-distance diagnosis if need be.⁵⁴ Only in very rare cases have attempts

50 D.C. 72 [73], 1, 1 [Xiph.]; Hdn. 1, 6, 1; 1, 6, 8.

51 Hdn. 1, 8, 1–15, 9, esp. 1, 8, 7; 1, 11, 5; 1, 13, 7 f.

52 It is only in recent years that attempts have been made to find rational explanations for the actions which, through the distortions of the ancient authors, do indeed seem crazy, or to filter out the standard commonplaces about tyrants from the accounts of the ancient authors; for Commodus cf. on this: Priwitzer 2009, op. cit., 108–159; Eckhard Meyer-Zwiffelhofer: Ein Visionär auf dem Thron? Kaiser Commodus, Hercules Romanus. In: *Klio* 88 (2006), 189–215; Christian Witschel: Kaiser, Gladiator, Gott. Zur Selbstdarstellung des Commodus. In: *SCI* 23 (2004), 255–272; Olivier Hekster: *Commodus. An Emperor at the Crossroads*. Amsterdam 2002; Falko von Saldern: *Studien zur Politik des Commodus*. Rahden/Westf. 2003; among the many works by Cristina De Ranieri, one may mention De Ranieri 1995, op. cit.

53 The term *Cäsarenwahn* ("madness of the Caesars") was coined by Ludwig Quidde in his 1894 study of the Emperor Caligula (AD 37–41). It is still today used to mean a tendency to overestimate and exalt oneself, addiction to dissipation, and paranoia. Quidde let it be known that his study was actually targeting Kaiser Wilhelm II (1888–1918), which brought him a prison sentence, cf. Karl Holl / Hans Kloft / Gerd Fesser: *Caligula—Wilhelm II. und der Caesarenwahnsinn. Antikenrezeption und wilhelminische Politik am Beispiel des "Caligula" von Ludwig Quidde*. Bremen 2001.—On the concept cf. briefly Aloys Winterling: Cäsarenwahnsinn im Alten Rom. In: *Jahrbuch des Historischen Kollegs* 2007. München 2008, 118–122; Christian Witschel: Verrückte Kaiser? Zur Selbststilisierung und Außenwahrnehmung nonkonformer Herrscherfiguren in der römischen Kaiserzeit. In: Christian Ronning (ed.): *Einblicke in die Antike. Orte – Praktiken – Strukturen*. Munich 2006, 87–96.

54 Especially in Caligula, e.g. by D. Thomas Benediktson: Caligula's Madness: Madness or Interictal Temporal Lobe Epilepsy? In: *CW* 82 (1988/89), 370–375,

been made to defend these rulers, usually by casting doubt on the ancient sources and/or reinterpreting them completely.⁵⁵ It would be tempting to ascribe to Twombly a knowledge of one classic: Edward Gibbon, the eighteenth-century historian, in his monumental work *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* largely follows Herodian's version for his account of Commodus. According to Gibbon, Commodus had from his youth indulged in life's pleasures, but he had become a bloodthirsty tyrant only through the bad influence of those around him, while his fear and hatred of the senate arose from the attempted coup by his sister Lucilla and the assassination attempts that followed.⁵⁶

But let us for a moment leave aside the uncertain issue of the literary source and turn to a securely attested inspiration of the Commodus series. In an undated letter, which, however, from the dated reply must have been written⁵⁷ around mid-/late December⁵⁸ 1963, Twombly reports to his gallerist Leo Castelli:

Have your series finished. 9 in all and 1 separate piece⁵⁹ if u need it
... I am really terribly happy over them & I think you will be pleased

who proposes that Caligula suffered from temporal lobe epilepsy, with the corresponding effects on his behavior; cf. Vin Massaro / Iain Montgomery: Gaius—Mad, Bad, Ill, or all Three? In: *Latomus* 37 (1978), 894–909, with an overview of the diagnoses for Caligula that had been proposed in research; the two authors themselves prefer to detect anxieties and mania (cf. Vin Massaro / Iain Montgomery: Gaius (Caligula) doth murder sleep. In: *Latomus* 38 [1979], 699–700).

⁵⁵ Cf. Winterling 2008, op. cit., 118.

⁵⁶ Cf. Edward Gibbon: *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Volume the First (1776) and Volume the Second (1781). Ed. by David Womersley. London 1995, 108–120.—In the list of books in Gaeta there is a rather slim volume of extracts of Gibbon's History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (*Reflections of the Fall of Rome* [part of the black set of Penguin 60s Classics]) published only in 1994. In this case too the 1994 edition possibly was a replacement.—Stemmrich 2009, 82, follows the idea of Gibbon when he terms Commodus' reign as "*durch Exzesse charakterisierte Herrschaft, die zum Untergang des Römischen Reiches führte*" ('rule characterized by excesses that led to the fall of the Roman Empire').

⁵⁷ Cf. New York 1994, 63 n. 152.

⁵⁸ A link between the completion of the painting and the anniversary of Commodus' death, December 31, is suggested by Cullinan 2009, 101.

⁵⁹ For reflections on this separate painting cf. Cullinan 2009, 108 n. 53.

by them. Thank you so much for giving the check on the Commodus: I lost my head for it, but *it inspired this series* so maybe it is good to lose my head & gain a new.⁶⁰

There are photographs that show Cy Twombly alongside ancient or classicizing portrait busts in his possession.⁶¹ None can be seen that are unambiguously identifiable as Commodus,⁶² but there are some that are from the same historical context: his father Marcus Aurelius, and Lucius Verus, adoptive brother of Marcus Aurelius and so Commodus' uncle. The shared fashion of the emperors of the so-called Antonine dynasty for wearing a full beard and long, curly hair makes a clear identification difficult in some cases. It is hence possible that Twombly had bought a bust as Commodus, which current research would identify rather as Marcus Aurelius or Lucius Verus.⁶³

Even if we cannot identify the Commodus portrait bust with certainty, through the letter we know of it and its role as inspiration⁶⁴ of the cycle. Naturally it would be very valuable to know whether it was a depiction in youth or as an adult and whether the image was civil, military, or religious in its connotations. In addition, we should certainly allow that Twombly may have known the Commodus bust in the Capitoline Museums, already

60 Transcription in New York 1994, 63 n. 152 (emphasis added). Castelli's estate is preserved in the Archives of American Arts, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.: <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/images/detail/cy-twombly-letter-to-leo-castelli-i1824> (25.06.2016). Kirk Varnedoe, *ibid.*, maintains—unfortunately without citing any source—that Twombly bought the bust in New York.

61 Cf. Delehanty 1976, 16. The original article in *Vogue* with the pictures by Horst P. Horst was unfortunately not accessible to me. Numerous images of this *Vogue* article are circulating on the Internet, e.g. <http://mondo-blogo.blogspot.de/2010/08/cy-twombly-is-that-hot.html> (25.06.2016); <http://www.apartmenttherapy.com/a-tribute-to-cy-twombly-vogue-150672> (25.06.2016); <http://habituallychic.blogspot.de/2010/11/at-home-in-rome.html> (25.06.2016); <http://032c.com/2011/from-vogue-to-nest-032c-activates-the-secret-history-of-cy-twombly-by-horst-p-horst/> (25.06.2015).

62 Cullinan 2009, 108 n. 51, supposes that the bust had passed into the possession of Castelli, because the latter had sent Twombly a cheque for it: "Efforts to locate the bust, which was apparently returned to Castelli and then resold, have so far not yielded any results."

63 Two busts of Marcus Aurelius can clearly be recognized in the photographs; one of the two could have been misunderstood as Commodus.

64 Cf. New York 1994, 63 n. 152.

mentioned.⁶⁵ The close link between the sculptural depiction of Commodus and the cycle is confirmed by the fact that at its first exhibition by Leo Castelli in New York a bust of Commodus was borrowed and displayed together with the pictures.⁶⁶ It may be that Twombly was fascinated by the contrast between the rigidity and muteness of the ancient bust(s) and “the excessive-lively lyric-dramatic expressive quality of his pictorial actions.”⁶⁷

Ancient busts can be assumed to have provided the idea also for some portraits made shortly before the Commodus cycle.⁶⁸ These include pictures about the bloody death of heroes and powerful men like Patroclus⁶⁹ (a Greek warrior in the *Iliad*), or the opponents in the civil wars, Pompey⁷⁰ and Caesar.⁷¹ Nicolas Cullinan sees the theme of death as being anchored in the “funereal atmosphere” of the early 1960s (with the Cuba crisis, among other things).⁷² Suzanne Delehanty learned in conversation with Twombly that his interest had been piqued by the contradictory characters of these figures, as they embodied in a single person both activity and sensibility, both great power and powerlessness.⁷³ For the Commodus cycle Twombly confirmed in conversation that he was fascinated by the contradiction in Commodus between *to beat* and *to be beaten*, and between creativity and destruction.⁷⁴ Reference is also often made to the fact that

65 Cf. Delehanty 1976, 16; Cullinan 2009, 104; Huber 1973, unpaginated.

66 “And we had a bust of the Emperor on loan during the show.” Ivan Karp in an interview with Paul Cummings on March 12, 1969 (<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-ivan-c-karp-11717> [25.06.2016]). Cf. Cullinan 2009, 104; Stemmrich 2009, 84.

67 Stemmrich 2009, 84: “*der exzessiv-lebendigen lyrisch-dramatischen Ausdrucksqualität seiner piktoralen Aktionen*”.

68 Huber 1973, unpaginated: “*In diesen Bildern schafft Twombly eine Situation mit einem Sockel für die betreffende Gestalt, und er attackiert dann das Bild, lässt ihm das widerfahren, was dem Menschen geschehen ist. So wird der klare Aufbau, der Sockel, auf dem dieser Mensch stand, beschmiert mit den Farben des Fleisches und des Blutes.*” (‘In these images Twombly creates a situation with a plinth for the relevant figure, and he then attacks the picture, lets it encounter what happened to the person. In this way the clear structure, the plinth, on which this person stood, is smeared with the colors of flesh and blood.’)

69 *Achilles Mourning the Death of Patroclus*, 1962 (HB II 132).

70 *Death of Pompey*, 1962 (HB II 128 and 129).

71 *Ides of March*, 1962 (HB II 136).

72 Cullinan 2009, 101.

73 Cf. Delehanty 1976, 16 with n. 8.

74 Cf. Leeman 2005, 80.

on November 22, 1963, John F. Kennedy was shot, with the suggestion that this was perhaps another reason that prompted (or rather reinforced, due to the sequence of events) reflection about powerful, assassinated men.⁷⁵ Cullinan suggests a direct influence on the Commodus series not just from the assassination of Kennedy, but also from the way the press treated this event that shook America:⁷⁶ *Life* magazine showed stills from the so-called Zapruder film which documented the assassination.⁷⁷ This thesis would require a very swift genesis for the painting, beginning only in December; yet the theme of Commodus must have been developed already by Twombly independently of this event.

We may here cross off some things that probably did not provide a model for Twombly. As an explanation of how Twombly came upon Commodus, the film *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, which was the model for the movie *Gladiator*, has been suggested. Although the film was shot in 1963, it did not premiere until 1964, i.e. after the creation of Twombly's Commodus cycle;⁷⁸ so the artist could at most have drawn his inspiration from reports of the filming in Spain.⁷⁹ Commodus appears as the lead figure in some historical paintings that lie behind other works by

75 Cf. New York 1994, 37; Stemmrich 2009, 83. Whether a role is also played here by the comparison of the USA with the Roman Empire (cf. *ibid.*), can be left open. In a 1963 speech Kennedy used the term *pax Americana* (<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/jfkamericanuniversityaddress.html> [25.06.2016]), which derives from the ancient term *pax Romana* (cf. Christian Meier: Von der "Pax Romana" zur "Pax Americana". In: *Pax Americana?*, ed. by the Alfred Herrhausen Gesellschaft für Internationalen Dialog. Munich/Zurich 1998, 95–124).

76 Cf. Cullinan 2009, 101.

77 *Life* Magazine no. 22 (1963) of 29.09.1963, 23–27. Cullinan 2009, 101, writes of nine stills published in *Life* magazine, and suggests this as a possible model for the number of images in the Commodus cycle. However, problems arise here on the one hand from Twombly's counting of the Commodus cycle as nine paintings and one separate piece, in a letter to Leo Castelli (cf. above n. 59), while on the other hand Issue No. 22 of *Life* magazine reproduces far more than nine stills.

78 <http://www.imdb.de/title/tt0058085/> (25.06.2016).

79 A search under <http://life.time.com/> (23.01.2013) yielded no results for reports on the filming. There are only interviews from, at the earliest, the late 1960s, in which Anthony Mann discusses *The Fall of the Roman Empire*. In general, history films about the ancient world were extremely popular in the late fifties and early sixties (e.g. *Ben Hur*, *Spartacus*, *Cleopatra*), so classical antiquity as a theme was, so to speak, 'in', cf. Cullinan 2009, 106 n. 7.

Twombly;⁸⁰ these could have prompted the artist's interest, but the multi-part character of Twombly's work—as will be discussed in more detail shortly—argues rather for a narration of historical events or character traits on the basis of the literary tradition. That Twombly could have been inspired by the view from his studio of the Colosseum, where Commodus had performed,⁸¹ is in principle possible, because in the late 1950s Twombly did indeed work in a studio with a view of the amphitheater.⁸² However, the Commodus series was painted in the studio on the Piazza del Biscione⁸³ (at the Campo dei Fiori), from where he would not have been able to see the amphitheater. Twombly would then have been 'carrying within himself' the subject of Commodus since the late fifties. Yet, as we learn from the letter to Leo Castelli, the specific prompt was given by the portrait bust of Commodus.

INTERPRETATION

The entire cycle is a treatment of the interaction of creative and destructive forces, which [are] presented through the example of the Emperor Commodus and which concern the nature of artistic productivity as a whole. The individual images represent in the most concentrated form, through variation and constellation of color tones, the analogy of psychic alterations in certain patterns of behavior [...]. Picture by picture, the cycle follows, through specific fixed points, the actions of Commodus, whose creative energy is dissolved in the identification with Hercules, in the activity as gladiator, in the divine image of his own immortality, until he finally succumbs to the

80 Peter Paul Rubens: *Emperor Commodus as Hercules and Gladiator* (circa 1597–99, private collection); Edwin Blashfield: *The Emperor Commodus Leaving the Arena at the Head of the Gladiators* (1878, Hermitage St. Petersburg).

81 Cf. Justinus Pieper: Cy Twombly—States of Mind (26.10.2009) (<http://www.globe-m.de/de/boulevard/cy-twombly-states-mind> [23.01.2013; no longer accessible]).

82 Cf. http://www.cytwombly.info/twombly_biography.htm (25.06.2016); <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/exhibition/cy-twombly/explore-exhibition/cy-twombly-room-2> (25.06.2016); Gordon Burn: Writing on the Wall, *The Guardian*, Saturday, June 14, 2008 (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2008/jun/14/saturdayreviewsfeatures.guardianreview17> [25.06.2016]).

83 Cf. HB V, p. 179.

bloody power craze of the “madness of the Caesars” [...] and is himself strangled by a servant in the bath. [...] A simple, formally conceptual element, a pencil line drawn horizontally through the gray surface area in all the pictures, symbolizes the consensus of ‘normal’ psychic behavior, which we experience as balance. In the constellation and selection of colors relative to each other and to this line, picture by picture we detect the beginning of psychic confusion and increasing indecisiveness in the hybrid behavior of Commodus, in his shocking killing sprees and his own violent death. After the white and blue of the still purely creative energy [Commodus I], which is painted within a grid structure that symbolically represents reason, comes the red of the start of his crazed acts [IV, V], its color muddying his halo. The poetic white and blue and the laurel wreath, which, in the image of Hercules, he himself had wound, correspond to identifications of an already divine consciousness. A deep, amorphous, red excess of color becomes the psychic expression of senseless violence and destruction, of the gruesome acts of blood in the power-crazed hubris of madness [VIII], and of his own violent death, in the golden glorification above an empty form is [the expression] of the exalted immortalization after death [IX]. *Discourses on Commodus* is a cycle in which Twombly achieves a masterly command of color as bearer of psychic form in a conceptually defined theme [...].⁸⁴

84 HB B, 25–26 [translated from the German original].—Less convincing is the interpretation of the color white by Cullinan 2009, 102, citing Katharina Schmidt: “The uncorrupted purity of white paint, which Twombly has characterized as being analogous to classical marble in his work [...]” The comment “White paint [...] is my marble” refers rather to the white coating of his sculptures (thus rightly in Nicholas Cullinan: *The Art of Assemblage: Columns, Collage and Bricolage*. In: London 2008, 151). The citation for the statement in Basel 2000, 49, is confusing: in the main text Schmidt refers to “a conversation in 1999,” but the footnote that directly follows the quotation cites an exhibition report by Franz Meyer: *Die Spuren subjektiver Existenz. Ausstellung Cy Twombly im Kunsthhaus Zürich*, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, March 7, 1987, 65, in which this quotation does not occur.—Bastian 1978, 22, takes the view that, while Twombly’s colors reflect general psychic aspects of the associations of colors as sense perception in an elementary and simple way, this seems nonetheless to have been determined also by numerous examples of Italian renaissance painting and various baroque pictures (cf. HB II, pp. 15–16; Huber 1973, unpaginated).

This interpretation by Heiner Bastian matches the chronological course of Commodus' reign as we find it in the sources. A still innocent accession to power (as recounted in Cassius Dio and Herodian), then the start of the bad influence, the first conspiracies and the onset of tyrannical behavior by Commodus, his self-deification, the bloodlust before his assassination: because even his closest associates voice cautious criticism of him, he plans to eliminate them; by chance this becomes known, those under threat of death preempt the tyrant with a conspiracy, and—after a poisoning goes wrong—he is strangled by an athlete.⁸⁵ Bastian's assumption of an "exalted immortalization after death" for the ninth picture in the cycle is correct in the long term, because Commodus, like many other (but 'good') emperors, was elevated to become one of the state gods, but this was done only some years after his death;⁸⁶ immediately after his assassination Commodus at first suffered *damnatio memoriae*, the obliteration of his memory.⁸⁷ This contradiction, too, may have piqued the interest of Twombly.

The cycle, according to this interpretation, would thus be the telling of a story. A statement by Twombly in an interview with Nicholas Serota points in this direction; however, this interview is from 2007 and refers to pictures from the more recent past: "So you have been working largely in sets and cycles and groups recently?"—"Yes, I don't know why I started that—it's like you can't get everything in one painting. I don't know why I do that—maybe they're pages in a book."⁸⁸

As regards his pictures' telling of stories, a remark by Twombly has an important bearing: his work on the Commodus cycle was influenced by Alain Robbe-Grillet.⁸⁹ In none of Robbe-Grillet's novels does Commodus play a role, so Twombly's inspiration can only have been the *Nouveau Roman* itself, as championed by Robbe-Grillet.⁹⁰ The (extremely modest)

⁸⁵ Hdn. I, 16, 2–17, 11; cf. D.C. 72 [73], 22, 2–5 [Xiph.].

⁸⁶ Hist. Aug. Comm 17, 11.

⁸⁷ Hist. Aug. Comm 18–20.

⁸⁸ London 2008, 52.—A 'seriality' of this sort is found also, for example, shortly after the Commodus series in Andy Warhol's *Sixteen Jackies* (1964) (cf. Cullinan 2009, 101); his earlier *Death in America* pictures present several photographs in series, but always show the same individual photograph (e.g. *White Burning Car III* [1963]).

⁸⁹ Cf. Delehanty 1976, 16; Leeman 2005, 156; Cullinan 2009, 102 with n. 19.

⁹⁰ As the collection of essays with theoretical reflections on the *Nouveau Roman* was translated into English only in 1965, Twombly will probably have read one

literary scholar in this ancient historian understands Robbe-Grillet in his theoretical essays as arguing that the *Nouveau Roman* above all rejects coherent actions, logical characters, individual heroes, and linear sequences of events, i.e. everything that makes up the classic novel.⁹¹ Neither the individual Commodus as center, as 'hero' of the cycle, nor a clear chronological development would really be compatible with the idea of the *Nouveau Roman*. One would have to understand the series in such a way that—stripped of literary and historical associations—problems like psychic development and change themselves become the story,⁹² or stress the contradictory nature, as already suggested, of the 'anti-hero' Commodus. To Delehanty Twombly interpreted the emperor as an oversensitive person who, due to his circumstances (as emperor), had not been able to express himself artistically,⁹³ and this had led to a life that was as a whole destructive—both for himself and for others.⁹⁴ Especially interesting here is the interpretation of Commodus as artist. By this Twombly would in essence anticipate an interpretation of the reign of Nero, but which can be applied also to Commodus: Nero saw himself primarily as an artist, among other things as an actor, and only secondarily, and even unwillingly, as emperor.⁹⁵ This type of rejection or neglect of his 'role' as emperor necessarily led to conflicts and frictions, which may have contributed to his negative image in the surviving sources. Transferred to

or more of the novels in translation (*Un Régicide* [1949]; *Les Gommages* [1953]; *Le Voyeur* [1955]; *La Jalousie* [1957]; *Dans le labyrinthe* [1959]). His knowledge of French cannot have been outstanding, because he read other French authors in translation (a point made by Thierry Greub).

⁹¹ Cf. Alain Robbe-Grillet: *For a new novel: essays on fiction*, New York 1965 (French original Paris 1963). Cf. Kurt Wilhelm: *Der Nouveau Roman. Ein Experiment der französischen Gegenwartsliteratur*. Berlin 1969, 11–27; Brigitta Coenen-Mennemeier: *Nouveau Roman*. Stuttgart et al. 1996, 9–16 and 26–54; Delehanty 1976, 16, takes the view in this context that Twombly "[...] not only explored the variations of psyche und color's psyche, but painting as an abstraction of time."

⁹² Cf. Berlin 1994, 40.

⁹³ In fact an ancient historian has subsequently made a very similar comment: within the limits of his abilities Commodus would have been able to lead a humble, useful life—for example as a craftsman (Maria Gherardini: *Studien zur Regierungszeit des Kaisers Commodus*. Wien 1974, 346).

⁹⁴ Cf. Delehanty 1976, 16; Huber 1973, unpaginated.

⁹⁵ Cf. Mischa Meier: "*Qualis artifex pereo*". Neros letzte Reise. In: *HZ* 286 (2008), 561–603.

Commodus this pattern of interpretation would mean that Commodus had regarded himself primarily as gladiator and not as emperor.⁹⁶ The link between performance as gladiator and the concept of the artist could perhaps derive from Gibbon: “[...] and some degree of applause was deservedly bestowed on the uncommon skill of the Imperial *performer*.”⁹⁷

Another point that may also argue against a chronological ordering of the pictures is the crossed-out comments at the left edge of the images. Thierry Greub reads on Parts II and III “the death of C”.⁹⁸ On Part IV “the god” can probably be read,⁹⁹ which—if it refers to the later divinization under Septimius Severus—would, purely chronologically, fit only after the assassination; alternatively, it could have something to do with the identification with Hercules. As the death of Commodus occurs on at least two or even five of the nine pictures in the cancelled texts, it may be that only the end of his life is treated; the appearance of Commodus in the arena, which the ancient authors connect to the identification with Hercules (“the god”?), occurred not long before his assassination. The assumption that only the final phase of his reign and above all the assassination of Commodus is the central theme of the series, however, does not, strictly speaking, fit with the interpretation that the color red, which appears ever more strongly as the series progresses, represents blood, as Commodus’ murder was not bloody.¹⁰⁰

On Part VI Thierry Greub plausibly reads “the poet”.¹⁰¹ It suits this reading that on Part VI, right at the top, three dabs of paint are circled and given the names of three Muses: “Melete”, “Mneme” (Mnemosyne), and “Aoide”.¹⁰² This is probably aiming at the idea, mentioned above, of a possible poetic-artistic career of Commodus. There is no evidence for this in the main

96 However, the performances as gladiator may have been an element of his assimilation to Hercules, who may have served as a model of the ‘good ruler’ who frees humanity from evils, cf. in brief Priwitzter 2009, op. cit., 151–153; Meyer-Zwiffelhofer 2006, op. cit., 189–215.

97 Gibbon 1995, op. cit., 118 (emphasis added).

98 Likewise Cullinan 2009, 107 n. 26, who, without detailed attributions deciphers in Pictures I, II, III, IV and VII “The death of C–”, “Death of C–”, and “Death”.

99 Ibid.

100 See above n. 85.

101 Here Cullinan 2009, 107 n. 26, reads “The god...” and relates it to an identification with Hercules.

102 Leeman 2005, 159.

literary sources, apart from the appearances as gladiator,¹⁰³ but there is some in another, less well known classical author. Blossius Aemilius Dracontius,¹⁰⁴ who worked in the later fifth century AD as a successful advocate¹⁰⁵ and as a poet who won distinction through public recitations at Carthage,¹⁰⁶ in his *Satisfactio*, a poetic appeal for clemency, cites Commodus as an example of a gentle emperor and calls him, in this context, a poet.¹⁰⁷ An English translation from 1936¹⁰⁸ could certainly have been available to Twombly.

Quite apart from the question of how watertight such an interpretation is, presupposing as it does a knowledge of the work of Dracontius, we are here confronted by the fundamental question of what the cancellations of these writings may mean: Are they really references to the individual pictures which we are entitled to take into account in interpretation? Or are they original titles or ideas that were then found unsuitable over the course of the work, as the image developed in a different direction? Cullinan offers the following interpretation: "The first seven of the paintings contain erasure, cancellation, and defacement of words, revealing either Twombly's hesitation or that of their subject, who was infamously indecisive."¹⁰⁹

For the question of whether the nine pictures present to us a historical sequence of whatever kind, we must also look more closely at the title of the cycle. In many publications the title of the series of pictures is given as *Discourse on Commodus*, sometimes supplemented by the addition *A Painting in nine parts*.¹¹⁰ However, two years ago Christie's auctioned a sheet of

103 In contrast, the appearances of Nero are attested in detail in literature, cf. Meier 2008, op. cit.

104 A survey of research can be found in Luigi Castagna (ed.): *Studi Dracontiani* (1912–1996). Naples 1997.

105 Drac. laud. dei 3, 653–661. Cf. Willy Schetter: Dracontius togatus. In: *Hermes* 117 (1989), 342–350.

106 Drac. Romul. 5 subscriptio.

107 Drac. Satisf. 187–190: *Alter ait princeps modico sermone poeta / Commodus Augustus, vir pietate bonus: / nobile praeceptum, rectores, discite, post me: / sit bonus in vita, qui volet esse deus*.

108 *Dracontii Satisfactio*. With introduction, text, translation & commentary by Sister [St.] Margaret [O'Donnell]. Philadelphia 1936.

109 Cullinan 2009, 102.

110 There is a complete misunderstanding in Bernard Myers: Marks. Cy Twombly. In: *Artforum* 20, 8 (1982), 52 f., who assumes *Discourses of Commodus* as title and therefore asks: "To whom is Commodus talking? Obviously to his dead father, the splendid Marcus Aurelius." Among others, Myers is also cited by Langenberg 1998, 105 f.

paper with Cy Twombly's handwriting which presented the formulation *Nine Discourses on Commodus*;¹¹¹ Cullinan has also presented evidence that the title *Nine discourses* was used at the first exhibition of the work in New York.¹¹² Aside from the question of whether it is one discourse or several, did Twombly link a particular idea with this term, perhaps along the lines that 'discourse' should not be equated with 'story' or 'history'? With 'discourse' one can imagine, for example, a speaker and an addressee,¹¹³ whereas in a 'story' the viewer is immersed in the tale (for example in *The Age of Alexander* [1959]¹¹⁴). Gregor Stemmrch has argued against such a strict distinction in Twombly; in his view, Twombly embraces both spheres simultaneously.¹¹⁵ The term 'discourse' naturally also leads one to think of Michel Foucault,¹¹⁶ whose early works *Folie et Dérison. Histoire de la folie à l'âge Classique* [*Madness and Civilization*] (1961) and *Naissance de la clinique. Une archéologie du regard médical* [*The Birth of the Clinic*] (1963) already use the term 'discourse'; in addition, the theme of madness presents a tempting link to Commodus. However, Twombly would have had to read these works, too, in the original French,¹¹⁷ because English translations appeared only after the Commodus series.¹¹⁸

As another possible source of inspiration for the Commodus series we must briefly refer to the portraits of Francis Bacon (1909–1992).¹¹⁹ Twombly regarded Bacon as the last great European painter,¹²⁰ and confirmed to Cullinan that Bacon's pictures had influenced his work on the Commodus cycle.¹²¹ Bacon pares the represented persons down to their

111 <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/drawings-watercolors/cy-twombly-nine-discourses-on-commodus-by-5294867-details.aspx> (25.06.2015).

112 Cf. Cullinan 2009, 107 n. 34.

113 Cf. Christian Metz: *Story/Discourse (A Note on Two Kinds of Voyeurism)*. In: id.: *Psychoanalysis and Cinema. The Imaginary Signifier*. London 1982, 91–98 (original: *Histoire/Discours. Note sur deux voyeurismes*. In: Julia Kristeva et al. [ed.]: *Langue, Discours, Société*. Pour Émile Benveniste. Paris 1975, 301–306), 91. Cf. the misunderstanding of Myers noted above (n. 110).

114 HB I 133.

115 Cf. Stemmrch 2009, 73.

116 Cf. Cullinan 2009, 102 with n. 30.

117 Cf. the reflections on Robbe-Grillet.

118 *Madness and Civilization. A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. New York 1965; *The Birth of the Clinic. An Archaeology of Medical Perception*. London 1973.

119 Cf. Stemmrch 2009, 82.

120 Cf. New York 1994, 37 with n. 153.

121 Cf. Cullinan 2009, 102 with n. 21.

bones in order to get closer to their personality, their secret, their soul, through the vital forces of color,¹²² so this link would in turn argue for the psychic development of Commodus.

In conclusion a fundamental question: Are we entitled to look for Commodus at all in the pictures? Ursula Panhans-Bühler has argued against this, as she is unable to detect in the cycle either the course of Commodus' life or his assassination.¹²³ Rather, in her view the reference to Commodus in the title hinders a clear view of the work: in the circles of color she sees a reminiscence of the double sphere and figure of eight that Twombly had developed in earlier works as signs for the areas of the female body that generate passion, and which here evoke arousals of emotion. Thus Panhans-Bühler reaches the conclusion: "The title lets the pendulum swing between the description of passion and the identification of passion, with the artist in between, whom the series permits to radicalize emotionally the field of gestural explorations; the link to formal signs from earlier images could confirm this."¹²⁴

CONCLUSION

Commodus was the starting point for Twombly. But why Commodus? If Twombly had been fundamentally concerned with working through the creative and destructive forces of a tyrant, he could have found better known examples in Caligula, Nero, or Domitian.¹²⁵ For Twombly, by his

122 Cf. Christoph Heinrich: Francis Bacon. Die Portraits. In: id. (ed.): *Francis Bacon. Die Portraits*. Ostfildern-Ruit 2005, 29 f.; Invar-Torre Hollaus: *Zwischen Inszenierung und Intimität. Kompositionsstrategien in Francis Bacons' Selbstbildnissen und Portraits*. In: Christoph Heinrich (ed.): *Francis Bacon. Die Portraits*. Ostfildern-Ruit 2005, 110. However, Heinrich, *ibid.*, 56, detects in the late fifties rather a suppression of this uncovering, and instead a pupation of the faces "by a mutating, liquefying mass, as if all characterizing traits were being forced inwards" ("durch eine mutierende, sich verflüssigende Masse, als würden alle charakterisierenden Züge nach innen zurückgetrieben").

123 Ursula Panhans-Bühler: Cy Twombly – Zeichen und Zeiten. In: Toni Bernhart / Gert Gröning (ed.): *Hand – Schrift – Bild*. Berlin 2005, 150 f.

124 *Ibid.*, 152: "Der Titel lässt das Pendel schwingen zwischen Leidenschaftsbeschreibung und Leidenschaftsidentifizierung, mit dem Künstler mitten dazwischen, dem die Serie ermöglicht, das Feld gestischer Untersuchungen emotional zu radikalisieren, was das Anknüpfen an Formzeichen früherer Bilder bestätigen könnte."

125 One would correspondingly also expect a more famous Egyptian pharaoh than

own account, the trigger was a portrait bust of Commodus which he had evidently acquired not long before. The series of photographs from 1966 in *Vogue* shows that Twombly—who had collected ancient objects ever since his first trip to Europe in 1952/53—owned numerous portrait busts of historical figures from the second century AD. Perhaps he came across Commodus by collecting, specifically, portrait busts of the Antonine family. Twombly will have gained his information about Commodus either directly through the ancient sources (Herodian and/or the *Historia Augusta*), or perhaps via Edward Gibbon. Yet in the nine paintings we probably do not have a chronological sequence of events from the life of Commodus, but, much more likely, the contradictory psychic states of an internally conflicted person, just as Nicola Del Roscio described it in 2012: “the cycle [...] refers to the complex psychological stages in the life and death of the emperor Commodus.”¹²⁶

ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

All works by Cy Twombly: © Cy Twombly Foundation, New York / Rome
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Sesostris, whom Twombly cites in *Coronation of Sesostris* (2000), among other places, cf. on this the contribution of Dietrich Wildung in this volume.

126 NDR Z II 268 (under ‘1964’). Kirk Varnedoe likewise detects in the series a psychotic Roman emperor whose reign was marked by gruesome excesses; in the dollops, placed side by side, of thickly sponged, often streaked or dripping paint, he sees a variety of moods, from cloud-like lightness to bloody violence (New York 1994, 37).

III. MODERNITY AS FRAME OF REFERENCE

I like poets because I can find a condensed phrase... My greatest one to use was Rilke, because of his narrative, he's talking about the essence of something. I always look for the phrase.

Cy Twombly, 2007

ARTUR ROSENAUER

DESTINY OR STRATEGY? ON THE QUESTION OF LATE STYLE IN TWOMBLY AND TITIAN

I

Twombly is an artist who invites comparisons. *Twombly and Poussin*¹, *Turner—Monet—Twombly*² are titles of exhibitions that have taken place in London and Stuttgart in recent years. While Twombly's inner kinship with Turner and Monet is immediately understandable, the grounds for comparison to Poussin become manifest in the thematics, foremost in the fascination with the ancient world that both artists display and not, admittedly, in the formal qualities.

Counter-posings of artists widely separated from one another in time are found repeatedly in art history. Even if they sometimes seem 'attracted by the hairs,' they can, on the other hand, be thoroughly eye-opening and illuminating. A remark by Bernard Berenson concerning Piero della Francesca thus offers occasion for fruitful contemplation: "This impersonality [of Piero] is indeed precisely the quality with which he casts a spell on us and on which his defining value is based—and only two other artists share in this quality: the one is nameless and chiseled the Parthenon pediments; the other is Velázquez, in whose painting no sentiment is ever betrayed."³ Perhaps even more aptly, Kenneth Clark

1 In the summer/fall of 2011 in the Dulwich Picture Gallery in London (Dulwich 2011).

2 In summer of 2012 in the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart (Stuttgart 2011).

3 Bernard Berenson: *Die italienische Malerei der Renaissance*. Zurich 1952, 115 ("Diese Unpersönlichkeit [Pieros] ist ja gerade die Eigenschaft, mit der er uns in Bann

points out the inner kinship of Piero with the master of the metopes of Olympia.⁴ A look, too, from Vermeer to Mondrian and *vice versa* might be illuminating for the understanding of each artist.⁵

Such counterpoints can often make the qualities of an entire artist's oeuvre or of an individual work clearer than can conventional comparisons, whose goal is usually to indicate genetic connections. Since Twombly, to my knowledge, has never referred to Titian in his statements, at stake in our case as well can only be the question of basic affinities.⁶

What is the case with Twombly and Titian? Before we concentrate on the question of the late work, let us cast a glance across the entirety of the two artists' oeuvres. Concerning the interest in antiquity, Twombly can, as with Poussin, also be compared with Titian. Themes of antiquity play an essential role in Titian, starting from the early period—one thinks of the mythologies for the Camerino d'Alabastro in Ferrara—to his *Poesie* created for Philipp II. For Titian as a 16th-century artist, it is more or less self-evident that he grapples with ancient themes. And while one may not primarily associate the art of the 20th century with themes of antiquity, it would be wrong to underestimate the fascination that antiquity has exercised on the modern—one need think only of Picasso, as one among many! Mediterranean art and its thematics must have put Twombly under their spell from the beginning. In his art, Twombly evokes ancient (and not only ancient) themes. In this, there lies the possibility of a new (perhaps also extended) access to the ancient world. Varnedoe

schlägt und auf der sein entscheidender Wert beruht – und nur zwei Künstler haben an ihr noch teil: der eine ist namenlos und meißelte die Giebelfelder des Parthenon, der andere ist Velázquez, in dessen Malerei sich niemals irgendeine Empfindung verrät.”)

4 Kenneth Clark: *Piero della Francesca*. Cologne 1970, 48. In this context, I recall a talk with Ulrich Middeldorf on the occasion of the Ghiberti-Symposiums in 1978 in Florence. He expressed his dissatisfaction then with the literature on Ghiberti, which he found had neglected the core of Ghiberti's art. Given the elegance, tact and delicacy of feeling his work evinces, one needs to compare him with artists such as Giorgione or Watteau.

5 Thierry Greub: *Vermeer oder die Inszenierung der Imagination*. Petersberg 2004, 114. On the topic of modern art's looking back upon older art as 'preposterous history,' cf. Mieke Bal: *Quoting Caravaggio. Contemporary Art, Preposterous History*. Chicago 1999.

6 I thank Thierry Greub for the confirmation of this claim. Nonetheless, Twombly identified Velázquez—the other great colorist—as “his favorite painter”; cf. Hochdörfer 2001, 98, fn. 110.



1 Cy Twombly: *Untitled*, Rome, 1957, oil-based house paint, colored pencil, wax crayon, lead pencil on paper, laid down on canvas, 70 × 100 cm, Siegen, Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Collection Lambrecht-Schadeberg

speaks of the endeavor to save the classical world from the restrictions of the academic.⁷ In Titian's case, the engagement with themes of antiquity certainly corresponds to a considerable extent with the wishes of the patron—however, not exclusively so! There are good reasons for assuming that Titian also had a hand in selecting his subjects himself and that he suggested the themes of the *Poesie* to his royal patron. Of course Titian does not content himself, as does Twombly, with allusions. For Titian, the represented subject is always what is primary. But in the course of his development, the materiality of the surface draws notice to itself ever more strongly. In Twombly, by contrast, the paint perceptibly (palpably) coated onto the canvas is constitutive from the beginning (ill. 1). In 1994 Werner Spies notes regarding Twombly: "The chapped, acultural graffiti of the Frenchman [implying Dubuffet], which had been accepted as the sole European model by the Americans in the post-war years, stands behind the first paintings. The genre that the artist invokes also becomes important for the contents. As does graffiti, which has pointed from time immemorial to exhibitionism. With coarse brushstrokes and heavy scratch marks, with imprints that are suggestive more of physiological performances and dried out secretions than painting, he radicalizes the artful slang of Dubuffet. [...] In almost all the texts that have to do with the work, the talk is of palimpsests. Half erased, half covertly rendered messages and references surface in the paintings."⁸

In view of Titian's late work, the memory of the originals of *Diana and Actaeon* (cf. p. 19, ill. 2) and *Diana and Callisto* (ill. 2) in Edinburgh imposes itself. These paintings are far less well-maintained than reproductions let one surmise. This can go so far that the canvas shows through at certain points. "Bare canvas is now visible in some areas of the cliff

7 Kirk Varnedoe in: New York 1994, 51.

8 Werner Spies: Das Geschlecht der Engel: Cy Twombly. In: *Kunstgeschichten – Von Bildern und Künstlern im 20. Jahrhundert*, vol. 2. Cologne 1998, 248 ("Die schrundigen, akulturellen Grafitti des Franzosen [gemeint ist Dubuffet], der in den Nachkriegsjahren von den Amerikanern als einziges europäisches Vorbild akzeptiert wurde, stecken hinter den ersten Bildern. Das Genre, auf das sich der Künstler beruft, wird auch wichtig für die Inhalte. Und Grafitti, das verweist seit Menschengedenken auf Exhibitionismus. Mit ungehobelten Pinselzügen und heftigen Kratzspuren, mit Abdrücken, die mehr an physiologische Verrichtungen und an ausgetrocknete Sekrete als an Malerei denken lassen, radikalisiert er den kunstvollen Slang Dubuffets. [...] In fast allen Texten, die sich mit dem Werk abgeben, ist von Palimpsesten die Rede. Halb ausradierte, halb verdeckt vorgetragene Botschaften und Hinweise tauchen in den Bildern auf.")



2 Titian: *Diana and Callisto*, 1556–1559, oil on canvas, 188 × 206 cm, Edinburgh, National Galleries of Scotland

behind Diana, the left side of Diana's body, and parts of the two nymphs at her feet; also Callisto's abdomen, the basis of the statue, the hair of the attendant holding a spear and the dog at the bottom right of the picture."⁹ Surprisingly, these losses impair the impression of the paintings less than one would expect. Imagine how a Bronzino would look for which a catalog had to note similar losses. In Titian, color is not simply only a surface that covers the painting ground, i.e., the canvas, and whose absence would tear holes in the coherence, but rather color and canvas are connected in an indissoluble way with each other. "His color is structural, like nature. It

9 *Italian and Spanish Paintings in the National Gallery of Scotland*, ed. by Hugh Brigstocke. Edinburgh ²1993 (1978), 183.

is not applied onto the painting ground, but rather grown together with it; it does not cover a surface, as it does in the rapidly painting masters of the late period; it presses towards us out of the depth."¹⁰

II

But let us come to the question of the "style of old age." In both artists, the biographical details permit us to actually speak of a style in old age. Twombly died in 2011 at the age of 83, and Titian may have been only about three years older (contrary to many false reports, not least his own).¹¹ An old-age style is a fascinating, but also dangerous terrain that entices recognitions that oscillate between useful insights and 'reverent mumbling.'¹² We want to proceed from Titian's late work and take it as a 'standard of measurement' for treating Twombly's late work.¹³

Of Titian one may suggest, as perhaps only of Rembrandt besides, that he is absolutely the artist of the late style. In the last two decades of his life, he arrived at a painting that, although having grown organically out of the earlier works, still broke away markedly from this as a late style.¹⁴ Works like *Nymph and Shepherd* in Vienna,¹⁵ *The Crowning with*

10 Theodor Hetzer: *Tizian. Geschichte seiner Farbe*. Frankfurt a.M. 31969 (1935), 70 ("Seine Farbe ist struktiv, wie die Natur. Sie ist nicht auf den Malgrund aufgetragen, sondern mit ihm verwachsen; sie bedeckt nicht, wie bei den schnell malenden Meistern der späteren Zeit eine Oberfläche, sie dringt aus der Tiefe uns entgegen.")

11 Countless publications exist on the question of age. The problematics is still outlined best in Erwin Panofsky: *Problems in Titian. Mostly Iconographic*. The Wrightman Lectures delivered under the Auspices of the New York University Institute of Fine Arts. London 1969, 176–179.

12 Cf. on this topic the recent exhibition catalog: *Letzte Bilder. Von Manet bis Kippenberger*, ed. Esther Schlicht / Max Hollein (Exhibition Catalog Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt am Main 2013). Munich 2013.

13 The occasion for my interest in the topic of 'late style' was an invitation from the Albertina to participate with an essay in a catalog for an exhibition on the late work of Kokoschka; cf. the writer's Gedanken zum Altersstil. In: *Oskar Kokoschka. Exil und neue Heimat, 1934–1980*, ed. Antonia Hoerschelmann (Exhibition Catalog Albertina Vienna 2008). Vienna 2008, 13–19.

14 Hans Ost: *Tizian-Studien*. Cologne/Weimar/Vienna 1992, 5–29.

15 Harald E. Wethey: *The paintings of Titian*, vol. III: The Mythological and Historical Paintings. London 1975, 166; *Tiziano*, ed. Miguel Falomir (Exhibition Catalog Prado Madrid 2003). Madrid 2003, 70; *Der späte Tizian und die*



3 Titian: *Danaë*, 1553–1554, oil on canvas, 129 × 180 cm, Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado

Thorns in Munich,¹⁶ the Hermitage's *Sebastian*,¹⁷ the Accademia's *Pietà*¹⁸ are, even if we have no certain dates at our disposal, the most important examples for what is commonly viewed as Titian's late style. In these works, which are characterized by a frankness in the painting technique that is unusual for their time, Titian departs decidedly from the brightly colored painting of his early period. He inclines to a broken, occasionally almost monochrome color scheme as well as to an open brushstroke and disregard of form. Hetzer's remarks on Titian's Madrid *Danaë* (ill. 3)—a work that marks the beginning of his style of old age in the 1550's—are instructive: "In the sense of the Renaissance ideal of a body that is in itself beautiful, sculptural, and throughout formed in a linear manner, the

Sinnlichkeit der Malerei, ed. Sylvia Ferino-Pagden (Exhibition Catalog Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien 2007/2008). Vienna 2007, 270–271.

16 Harald E. Wethey: *The Paintings of Titian*, vol. I: The Religious Paintings. London 1969, 37, 39 und 83.

17 Ibid., 155–156, 194; Vienna 2007, op. cit., 350–53.

18 Wethey 1969, op. cit., 122–123; Vienna 2007, op. cit., 354–347.

body of the Madrid *Danaë* is comparatively ugly; drawing and modeling are careless. But this uglification indeed arises each time that a great artist in his late period follows more the subjective law of his genius than the objective and recognized norms of the period in which he lives and has grown.”¹⁹

In the last sentence is heard something like a theory of the late style. In all the ‘elder-work artists,’ we are permitted to assume an inner independence, a strengthened self-confidence, a belief in oneself. An inner freedom and the courage of experience allow for pursuing a path that one has decided to be right in contrast to the judgment of contemporaries. The ‘becoming who you are’ is more crucial than current trends. Lacking as well as exaggerated self-confidence may lead in lesser talents to narrowness and routine. If the potential is great and the horizon wide, however, the artist can tread paths no longer given for most of his contemporaries to follow. Such musings make clear that the style of old age stands in sharpest contrast to any epigonism. Elder style has nothing to do with the intention of remaining forever current and jumping on trains moving in the direction of the most modern trends. A certain impatience with the rules of craft, a freedom of execution for which long years of practice and intimate familiarity with the medium of painting form the prerequisite—qualities that may be misunderstood occasionally by contemporaries—characterize these works.

The artist has experiences at his command that allow him to recognize what he can relinquish—and precisely these are the conditions for a sovereignty that at times will be misunderstood as caprice. Looking back at his own experiences does not exclude a progression, an openness for new experiences. This inner freedom may be one reason that the chronology of Titian’s work in old age is quite controversial. In Twombly as well, there is a style of old age. It is not difficult to differentiate works like the *Quattro Stagioni* (cf. p. 298, ill. 4 and p. 331, ill. 5) or the *Lepanto* series (ills. 4.1–4.3) from earlier works and to recognize the stylistic changes. Preference for color surfaces in place of lines; lush colors often applied by hand, like bright yellow, red, blue—but above all red. But how might we explain these differences in Twombly’s case? May we say: Twombly’s style has developed in a certain direction? Put more pointedly: has something happened in his painting on which he ultimately has no influence? Even

19 Hetzer 1969, op. cit., 152. Regarding literature on the *Danaë*: Wethey 1975, op. cit., 56–60 and 133–135; Madrid 2003, op. cit., 236; Vienna 2007, op. cit., 232–234.

if one may assume that artists observe themselves and reflect upon their own style, I am just as much convinced that the unconscious sticks to the creation of the most intellectual and calculating artist.²⁰ By this is implied that in an artist's creating—naturally, in his late work as well—destiny and calculation are not inevitably exclusive. In Twombly's case, we know something more.

Armin Hochdörfer recently published an essay "Cy Twombly. How to hold the tension", in which he recounts an encounter with Twombly from the period around 1995/96: "... completely thoughtlessly I expressed my doubts in an incidental remark about the late works of Rauschenberg, at which Twombly abruptly reproved me in a sharp tone: 'Do you have any idea how difficult it is to hold the tension over several decades?' He stood up and walked back and forth in the restaurant (which he always did when he was upset), looked out the window at the open sea and finally returned to the table. With that, the discussion was unmistakably finished."²¹ In this it becomes clear that Twombly has well indeed racked his brain how,

20 There is a little known source that reports how Titian contemplated the singularities of his style and calculatedly employed these. In 1603 Antonio Perez reports that Titian had answered, to the question of Francisco de Vargas, Karl V's ambassador to Venice, about Titian's using such a broad brushstroke, that he would not be certain of ever attaining the fineness of brush of a Michelangelo, Raphael, Correggio or Parmigianino and since he would not wish to be their imitator, he would go his own way. Since I could not find the original wording in the secondary literature, I include it below in the text of the Spanish original edition. Antonio Perez: *Segundas Cartas*. Paris 1603, 120v–121r: "*Tal me paresçe lo que oy vn dia en Veneçia à Tiçiano mismo, aquel gran Pintor. Preguntauale vn dia el Embaxador Françisco de Vargas (Embaxador en aquella Republica de Carlo Quinto, Varon de los muy çelebres, y estimados de (121) los de mi naçion, y siglo) porque auia dado en aquella manera de pintar tan sabida suya de golpes de pinçel grosseros, casi como borrones al descuydo (que borrones es quanto pinta el Poder humano caydos del appetito la mas vezes) y no con la dulzura del pinzel de los raros de su tiempo: Respondio el Tiçiano 'Señor, yo desconfiè de llegar à la delicadeza, y primor del pinzel de Michael Angelo, Vrbina, Corregio, y Parmesano, y a quando bien llegasse, seria estimado tras ellos,ò tenido por imitador dellos, y la Ambición natural, no menos à mi Art, que à las otras, me hizo echar por camino nuevo, que me hiziesse çelebre en algo, como los otros lo fueron por el que siguieron.'* No es mala la razon à mi juyzio."

21 I am citing here from the German original manuscript, which Achim Hochdörfer kindly put at my disposal [English version here is translated from the German]; in English in: *Cy Twombly. The Last Paintings* (Gallery Catalog Gagosian Gallery Beverly Hills 2012). Beverly Hills et al. 2012, 6.



4.1-4.3 Installation view of Cy Twombly: *Lepanto*, Lexington, 2001, acrylic, wax crayon, graphite on canvas, differing dimensions, at Gagosian Gallery, 555 West 24th Street New York, January 19 – February 23, 2002

already then following a long career, his painting ought to proceed. The question imposes itself: to what extent is this also valid for other artists? Twombly recounted to Hochdörfer “that he used the phallus motif for the last time in this painting [meaning the autumn painting from the *Quattro Stagioni* of 1993/94]; he avoided the thematic aggressivity and the formal forward thrust of the sign in his late work, which begins following this cycle. Since then he has preferred directionless forms floating free in the pictorial space.”²² It remains open whether the directionless forms floating in the pictorial space were program and calculation from the beginning on or intuition. In any case, Twombly has deliberated on his art.

In this context, a remark by Twombly should not remain unmentioned. And while it does not refer immediately to the issue of late style, it does emphasize the primacy of the artwork over the idea. In Twombly’s atelier in Bassano, Kirk Varnedoe found the following sentence scribbled on a piece of paper: “The Image cannot / be dispossessed of a / priIMORDIAL / freshness / which IDEAS / CAN NEVER CLAIM.” He thus underscores the primacy of doing over that of reflecting. Varnedoe took this sentence to be important enough that he places it at the end of his book on Twombly.²³

In connection to these considerations on Twombly, it should be indicated that the question of Titian’s late style is also not as entirely simple

²² Ibid., 10.

²³ New York 1994, 52, with ill. 46.



as initially sketched. Some decades ago, Charles Hope pointed out that there are other works alongside the so-called ‘characteristic’ late works. “Every recent writer on the subject has argued that at the very end of his life he evolved a new way of painting, which I shall call his ‘last style’, characterized by a reduction in his palette and an unprecedentedly free and impressionistic type of brushwork. At this period, so it is said, he was painting primarily for posterity in a manner largely incomprehensible to his contemporaries, like Rembrandt in old age. In the works which supposedly embody this style, [...] ‘form is dissolved in light and colour’ to use the current cliché. That these paintings are very different from the late works for Philip is not in question [...].”²⁴ Hope then points to works like *Tarquin and Lucretia*, today in Cambridge,²⁵ and the *Hieronymus* in El Escorial,²⁶ which were verifiably sent to Philip II only in the last years of Titian’s life (*Tarquin* 1571 and *Hieronymus* 1575), and comes to the conclusion that, if one follows the documentary evidence, only these works may strictly speaking be considered valid as the vouched-for late works of Titian—and that those paintings that we have till today taken to be the latest works would be nothing other than unfinished. With that we stand at the beginning of a discussion that is of course essential for the

²⁴ Charles Hope: *Titian*. London 1980, 161.

²⁵ *Tarquinius und Lucretia*, in: Wethey 1975, op. cit., 180–81; Madrid 2003, op. cit., 282–283; Vienna 2007, op. cit., 256–60, sent to Philip II in 1571.

²⁶ *Hieronymus*, in: Wethey 1969, op. cit., 136; Madrid 2003, op. cit., 286 f.; Vienna 2007, op. cit., 234–37. Sent to Philip II in 1575.

understanding of the late Titian. Here is not the place to enter into this discussion and deepen the arguments, however, for it would lead us too far from our theme 'Titian and Twombly.'

It may suffice to share the inferences that I believe can be drawn from this discussion. Titian's late work is manifestly more complex than one thought it to be up to thirty years ago.²⁷ There are in fact late works that are presented in a perfection of craft that hitherto had not willingly been credited to the late Titian. On the other side: not everything that Hope views as unfinished is indeed that. The *Punishment of Marsyas* in Kroměříž is signed,²⁸ indicating that the artist viewed it as finished. In Treviso, a copy of the *Nymph and Shepherd* exists that arose only a few decades after Titian's death. Other paintings, such as *The Entombment*²⁹ or the *St Margaret and the Dragon* (both in the Prado),³⁰ likewise intended for the Spanish king, possess qualities that allow one to subsume them clearly under the concept of the late style as understood prior to Hope. The late works of Titian thus exhibit stages of completion. But one point remains: there are manifestly works in which a royal commission may have induced the artist to compel himself to a painting that is more completed and more consummate in terms of craft. The monumental canvas with *Tarquin and Lucretia* in Cambridge, which was originally intended for Philip II and was sent to Madrid a few years before Titian's death, is clearly the example of this surprising perfectionism in old age that is carried farthest. In our context, it is of interest that late style represents a multi-leveled phenomenon. When he wants to or when he needs to, Titian can do it differently.

And yet one may assert that elder style is not a program, not a strategy—not something that one strives for, but destiny and unfolding of a potential, perhaps something that one seeks to justify in retrospect and to explain. Does that also apply?

The question of intentionality cannot be answered simply. It is repeatedly pointed out that artists in old age are subject to certain infirmities, from which their art can be explained. One need think only of the references to Monet's diminished eyesight in old age, which may have lead to a freer painting more removed from detail. Is it a matter in

²⁷ Cf. Ost 1992, op. cit.; Madrid 2003, op. cit.; Vienna 2007, op. cit.

²⁸ *Marsyas*, in: Wethey 1975, op. cit., 91–93, 153–54; Madrid 2003, op. cit., 292–95; Vienna 2007, op. cit., 272–75.

²⁹ *Entombment*, in: Wethey 1969, op. cit., 90–91; Madrid 2003, op. cit., 260–63.

³⁰ *St Margaret*, in: Wethey 1969, op. cit., 141–42; Madrid 2003, op. cit., 258–259; Vienna 2007, op. cit., 290–93.

Monet of the impact of an infirmity or of a new style that could only be recognized and fully appreciated several decades after the artist's death? On the part of art historians, it is readily argued that it would be wrong to explain a style in old age solely by the physical situation of the artist, but rather that artist intentions stand behind this. One could say that the concept based on Riegl of the 'will to art' triumphs over the banality of the physical explanation. Yet it does not appear to be so simple. In all likelihood, a synthesis of these opposing positions probably approaches closest to reality.³¹

It cannot be denied that age brings along impairments, which can be preconditions for the emergence of something new. How much—so one could ask—does age allow this; or perhaps better: does age compel one to potentially work out a new spectrum of possibilities, of which the artist—despite the boundaries now set before him—is capable of making use of thanks to his experience? Intuition or conscious desire, that is a question that cannot be answered so simply—but the fact that Titian manifestly was able to still have command over different facilities allows one to conclude that the phenomenon and perhaps also the problematics of his late style were thoroughly known to him. Yes, one could ask, was Titian entirely himself in works like *The Crowning with Thorns*, *Nymph and Shepherd* or the *Pietà*? In the paintings for the Spanish king, did he compel himself to an official, less subjective style, yet one more understandable for the audience? The question ultimately remains unanswerable. In Twombly, we know. According to his own testimony, the late style posed for him a problem with which he contended.

III

To conclude with a personal confession: As much as the late works of Twombly (cf. pp. 362–363, ill. 3–8) impress me, they speak less to me than those of the 1960's and '70's. That of course is far from meaning that Twombly's late works are weaker than his earlier ones. Admittedly, this is an extremely unscientific question; nevertheless, even if I am aware that an art historian should eschew judgments on quality if possible, I do not wish to refrain from posing the question. Twombly is no isolated

31 Clement Greenberg: Der späte Monet (1957). In: Greenberg: *Die Essenz der Moderne*. Amsterdam/Dresden 1997, 238.

case. One encounters analogous phenomena at every turn. One need think only of the long-lasting misapprehension of the late work of Monet. Or one thinks of the late Picasso, of the ‘demolishing’ of his late work by Greenberg³² and of the saving of his honor by Werner Spies.³³ The starting point for the above-cited remark by Hochdörfer in conversation with Twombly was a skepticism vis-à-vis the late work of Rauschenberg. I had the privilege of following closely until his death the creative work of Jusek Mikl (1929–2008), with whom I was friends. And I well remember that I was occasionally irritated in encountering his latest works (ill. 5), in any case often less impressed than by his earlier creativity.³⁴

And here, too, the circle of our reflections closes with a look at Titian. It is well known that Titian initially, as well in the centuries that followed, received anything but appreciation for his late works. In Vasari’s skepticism, one can take into account the Florentine’s bias, which places *disegno* above *colore*. But this skepticism is also known to us from other contemporaries. Hans Ost has written a highly instructive chapter on “Style and Style of Old Age” in his studies of Titian.³⁵ The existence of a late work was not only noticed quite early in Titian, but positions were also adopted, and the decline of quality in the late works was spoken of—and this question, which has long occupied researchers, has still not been relinquished by them today. Two instances for the purpose of illustration: In 1793 an exchange of paintings took place, extremely disadvantageous for Vienna, between the galleries of the Duchy of Florence and the royal collections in Vienna. At that time, major works, such as Titian’s *Flora*, Giovanni Bellini’s *Sacra Allegoria* and Albrecht Dürer’s *Epiphany* were delivered to Florence. Among the almost 30 paintings in total that went from Vienna to Florence was also Titian’s *Nymph and Shepherd*.³⁶ Luckily

32 Clement Greenberg: Picasso mit fünfundsiebzig (October 1957). In: *ibid.*: *Die Essenz der Moderne*. Amsterdam/Dresden 1997, 241 and 242.

33 Werner Spies: Malen gegen die Zeit. In: Werner Spies (ed.): *Picasso—Malen gegen die Zeit* (Exhibition Catalog Albertina Vienna 2006/2007). Ostfildern 2006, 35.

34 The illustration of a late painting by Mikl offers me the opportunity to point out (late work-presupposing?) analogies to the late Twombly: large-surface quality, monumental forms, inclination to bold presentation, lapidary colorfulness.

35 Ost 1992, op. cit., 5–29.

36 On the exchange of paintings between Vienna and Florence, cf. Eduard v. Engerth: *Gemälde, Beschreibendes Verzeichnis*, vol. I. Vienna 1882, XXX.



5 Josef Mikl: *Aufrechte Begegnung*, 2007, oil on canvas, 200 × 200 cm, Estate Josef Mikl

for Vienna, this work found no favor in the eyes of the Florentines and was sent back to Vienna as not corresponding to quality standards. In the 20th century, the tide has turned. Panofsky described *Nymph and Shepherd* as Titian's "*ultima poesia*, one of the most 'pictorial' pictures ever produced by Titian."³⁷ For Kahnweiler, it is supposed to have been the most beautiful painting in the world.³⁸ A similar destiny was, incidentally, also to befall the Hermitage *Sebastian*. After the Barbarigo collection was purchased by the Russian Czar in 1850, the *Sebastian* was relegated to the warehouse,

³⁷ Panofsky 1969, op. cit., 25 and 171.

³⁸ I am grateful to Werner Spies for the reference.

ranked as third-rate, only to find in the 20th century the appreciation that it was due.³⁹ A statement by the major Spanish connoisseur Carl Justi is also noteworthy, who wrote the following in 1889 in an essay on Titian's works in the Spanish collections: "The catalog boasts forty-one originals, among which some works are of the first rank, such as the Bacchanal from Ferrara, the equestrian portrait of Charles V, the Glorias; the majority are, admittedly, associated with his mode in old age."⁴⁰ The entirety of the prodigious late work, which today accounts for the claim to fame of one of the finest galleries in the world, is dismissed by Justi with a disparaging sub-clause. And that 300 years after Titian's death!

Uncertainties in the judgment of quality go hand in hand with uncertainties that one has quite generally in the face of the new. And style in old age is usually something new, something departing from the path. Whether it is now a matter of contemporary art or also of Titian or Rembrandt, late work has in most cases not had it easy in finding its due recognition. This is connected to a departure from period fashions and a departure from the conception that one has previously had of the artist. The lesson to be drawn is that one is wary as an art historian of posing the issue of quality in the foreground. One does justice at best to the problem of 'value judgment' in regard to old-age style when one abides by the wisdom of Lope de Vega in the face of the hermetic work of Góngora: "Whatever may happen, I will always treasure and love the divine genius of this caballero, will modestly accept from him what I understand, and will reverently admire what I am incapable of understanding."⁴¹

39 Wethey 1969, op. cit., 155–156.

40 Karl Justi: Verzeichnis der früher in Spanien befindlichen, jetzt verschollenen oder ins Ausland gekommenen Gemälde Tizians. In: *Jahrbuch der königlich preussischen Kunstsammlungen*, vol. X. Berlin 1889, 181 ("Der Katalog gibt einundvierzig Originale an, darunter sind einige Werke ersten Ranges, wie die ferraresischen Bacchanalen, das Reiterbildnis Karls V., die Glorie; die Mehrzahl gehört freilich seiner Altersweise an.")

41 Cited from Jorge Luis Borges: *Der Ulysses von Joyce* (1925). In: *ibid.*: *Eine neue Widerlegung der Zeit*. Frankfurt a.M. 2003, 19–23, here 23 ("Was auch geschehen mag, ich werde immer den göttlichen Genius dieses Caballero schätzen und lieben, von ihm demütig annehmen, was ich verstehe, und ehrfürchtig bewundern, was zu verstehen ich unfähig bin.")

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1 Cy Twombly: *Hero and Leandro (To Christopher Marlowe)*, Rome, 1985, oil paint, oil-based house paint on canvas, 202 × 254 cm, Private Collection, Courtesy Thomas Ammann Fine Art AG, Zurich

LISA HOPKINS

TWOMBLY'S *HERO AND LEANDRO* (TO CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE)

'*Leander and Heroes* loue is in euery mans mouth' said Abraham Fraunce in 1592, and nearly forty years later John Taylor the Water Poet recounted how 'As in my boat I did by water wander / Repeating lines of *Hero and Leander*'. Nor was Christopher Marlowe's great poem *Hero and Leander* remembered only through the medium of words: Roy Booth points out that 'Mortlake tapestries depicting the story, manufactured from 1625 onwards, survive ... These luxury commodities must have had down-market parallels in painted cloths, wall paintings, plasterwork, and other smaller artefacts. The story lent itself to mildly erotic illustration, and to a compensating moral message'.¹ Booth suggests two reasons for the popularity of the *Hero and Leander* story in London in the seventeenth century, one archetypal and one geographical: firstly that 'Leander ... swims through the water, naked and strong, giving such proof of his good genetic make-up that he invites reduction to a suggestion of the basic biology of sexual reproduction, a sperm swimming towards an ovum'² and secondly that it mapped neatly onto the topography of London itself, especially after Ben Jonson's parody of the poem in *Bartholomew Fair* transposed its events to the banks of the Thames:

The joke seems to have taken root because, at a basic level, 'Hero and Leander' was a story about a young man who crossed to the other side of a waterway to get sex. As the story was revisited by seventeenth century English writers, it mapped exactly onto their own urban

¹ Roy Booth: *Hero's Afterlife: Hero and Leander* and 'lewd unmannerly verse' in the late Seventeenth Century. In: *Early Modern Literary Studies* 12.3 (2007). Online: <http://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/12-3/boother2.htm> (12 October 2012).

² Ibid.

geography. Abidos and Sestos became London and Southwark. Men in search of amusement seem to have preferred to travel by water across the Thames to the South Bank.³

I am inclined to the second of Booth's two suggested reasons, because *Hero and Leander* is fundamentally a narrative of division, and this is something it perhaps has in common with Twombly's versions of the painting (ill. 1; cf. ill. 5–6).

Harald Szeemann, declaring that 'For Twombly, the first thing is the line', argues that 'In the tale of Hero and Leander, Twombly breathes into colour his personal vision of the impossibility of contact. In the depths there is peace for one who set out in the heat of the moment, like the wave, to meet his death in the sea'.⁴ Marlowe's poem is set on the banks of the Hellespont, one of the points where Europe meets Asia, and involves repeated and increasingly dangerous negotiations of that threatening, liminal space. Marlowe tells us that 'At Sestos Hero dwelt' (l. 5), that is on what is now the Gallipoli peninsula, while Leander lived at Abydos, a city in Asia Minor which was later used by Xerxes as a springboard for the invasion of Greece. The difference between Sestos and Abydos thus marks the difference not only between two cities but between two continents, and while it is possible to cross from one to the other, Leander finds it dangerous to do so. Indeed the crossing of the strait explicitly brings Leander's gender identity into question, or at least appears to, when Leander supposes that Neptune's sexual advances must mean that the god has mistaken him for a woman:

The god put Helle's bracelet on his arm,
And swore the sea should never do him harm.
He clapped his plump cheeks, with his tresses played,
And smiling wantonly, his love bewrayed.
He watched his arms, and as they opened wide
At every stroke, betwixt them would he slide,
And steal a kiss, and then run out and dance,
And as he turned, cast many a lustful glance,
And threw him gaudy toys to please his eys,
And dive into the water, and there pry

³ Ibid.

⁴ Harald Szeemann: Cy Twombly: An Appreciation. In: *Cy Twombly: Paintings, Works on Paper, Sculpture*. Munich 1987, 10–11.

Upon his breast, his thighs, and every limb,
 And up again, and close beside him swim,
 And talk of love. Leander made reply,
 'You are deceived, I am no woman, I'⁵

(Sestiad II, 663–76)

Marlowe is of course teasing us here—Neptune is perfectly well aware that Leander is no woman, and that is precisely why he is interested—but from Leander's point of view there seems to be a sense that this location is so liminal that change of almost any kind is possible in it. The poem even offers its twin cities as the locus of a 'myth of origins' for the difference between European and non-European when we are told that

So lovely fair was Hero, Venus' nun,
 As Nature wept, thinking she was undone,
 Because she took more from her than she left,
 And of such wondrous beauty her bereft:
 Therefore, in sign her treasure suffered wrack,
 Since Hero's time hath half the world been black.

(Sestiad I, 45–50)

This is, then, a space so liminal that the categories of both gender and race may be rendered fluid and unstable, or at least come under scrutiny, when it is traversed.⁶

Marlowe himself is of course crossing a boundary of his own here in his open depiction of homoeroticism, but what may be less obvious is that he is doing so in another respect too, for his interest in movement through water is highly unusual for the period. Swimming was an art so abstruse that in the year that *Tamburlaine* was first staged, 1587, Sir Everard Digby published a guide to it, *De arte natandi*, which was translated into English eight years later by Christopher Middleton and published as *A short introduction for to learne to swimme*, which Middleton dedicated to Simon Smith because, as he explained, he had heard a rumour that Smith could swim

⁵ All quotations from 'Hero and Leander' are from Christopher Marlowe: *Hero and Leander*. In: Patrick Cheney / Brian J. Striar: *The Collected Poems of Christopher Marlowe*. Oxford 2006.

⁶ For more detailed discussion of this see Lisa Hopkins: Marlowe's Asia and the Feminisation of Conquest. In: Debra Johanyak / Walter Lim: *The English Renaissance, Orientalism, and the Idea of Asia*. Basingstoke 2010, 115–130.

himself; however, it seems doubtful that many people were able to use this to become strong and competent swimmers, since it offers a cheerful exhortation to would-be swimmers to ‘rudely leape into the water with their feete downwarde’, after which it is presumably a bit late to turn to the next page (ills. 2–3).⁷ In *Edward II*, Gaveston contemplates swimming:



2-3 Sir Everard Digby: *De arte natandi duo quorum prior regulas ipsius artis...*, London 1587, translated by Christopher Middleton as *A short introduction for to learne to swimme*, 1595 (E1r-E2v)

⁷ Everard Digby: *A short introduction for to learne to swimme* (translated Christopher Middleton). London 1595, sig. B2r.

Sweet prince, I come; these, these thy amorous lines
Might have enforced me to have swum from France
And, like Leander, gasped upon the sand.

(I.i.6–8)

However, it is not at first clear in *Hero and Leander* that Leander actually does swim: initially all we are actually told is that 'he got him to a rock aloft', and then

prayed the narrow toiling Hellespont
To part in twain, that he might come and go,
But still the rising billows answered 'No.'
With that he stripped him to the ivory skin,
And crying, 'Love, I come,' leapt lively in.
Whereat the sapphire-visaged god grew proud,
And made his capering Triton sound aloud,
Imagining that Ganymede, displeased,
Had left the heavens; therefore on him he seized.
Leander strived, the waves about him wound,
And pulled him to the bottom ...

(Sestiad II, 632–44)

Leander at first hesitates to jump, hoping instead that a miracle will happen and the waves will part; when he finally does plunge in, he goes straight down. Not until Neptune realises that he is almost drowning and releases him did 'Leander being up, began to swim' (l. 659); before that the agency is wholly Neptune's, and the overall sense of the passage is thus of the risks of swimming rather than on any pleasure or power it might confer. This is echoed too when Leander's story is recalled in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, where Rosalind assures Orlando that Leander 'being taken with the cramp, was drowned'.⁸ Over two centuries later Lord Byron, having actually swum the Hellespont in direct imitation of Leander, noted that doing so had given him the ague.⁹ Does Twombly too give us a sensation of being overwhelmed, of being unable to navigate what we see in the painting?

⁸ William Shakespeare: *As You Like It* (ed. Agnes Latham). London 1975, IV.i.95–101.

⁹ In the last line of *Written after swimming from Sestos to Abydos*.

It is important not to get too solemn, though, for *Hero and Leander* is also deliciously comic. Marlowe is always said not to be able to do comedy, but the printer of *Tamburlaine* noted that he had in fact removed some comic material from the original text, and *Hero and Leander* should comprehensively disprove the *canard*, as we can see in the following passage from it:

Albeit Leander, rude in love, and raw,
 Long dallying with Hero, nothing saw
 That might delight him more, yet he suspected
 Some amorous rites or other were neglected.
 (Sestiad II, 545–48)

This leads him to experiment further, to even greater comic effect:

She, fearing on the rushes to be flung,
 Strived with redoubled strength; the more she strived,
 The more a gentle pleasing heat revived,
 Which taught him all that elder lovers know.
 And now the same 'gan so to scorch and glow,
 As in plain terms (yet cunningly) he craved it;
 Love always makes those eloquent that have it.



4 Joseph Mallord William Turner: *The Parting of Hero and Leander—
 from the Greek of Musaeus*, 1837, oil on canvas, 146 × 236 cm, London,
 The National Gallery



5 Cy Twombly: *Hero and Leander*, Rome, 1962, oil paint, lead pencil, wax crayon on canvas, 200 × 243 cm, Private Collection, Courtesy Thomas Ammann Fine Art AG, Zurich

She, with a kind of granting, put him by it,
 And ever as he thought himself most nigh it,
 Like to the tree of Tantalus she fled,
 And, seeming lavish, saved her maidenhead.

(ll. 550–60)

It was this aspect of the poem which sparked the interest of Byron, whose 1810 poem *Written after swimming from Sestos to Abydos* begins,

If, in the month of dark December,
 Leander, who was nightly wont
 (What maid will not the tale remember?)
 To cross thy stream, broad Hellespont!¹⁰

The poem goes on to recall that Leander did this, ‘According to the doubtful story, / To woo—and Lord knows what beside’ (ll. 14–15), clearly recalling the comic inexperience of Marlowe’s hero and the delicious vagueness of the poem’s oft-repeated ‘it’.¹¹ Byron’s own aesthetic sensibility and delicate versification here sustains a sympathetic dialogue which annihilates the years to present him and the Marlowe of *Hero and Leander* as twinned spirits. For both poets the comedy derives from indefiniteness, and it may not be too fanciful to consider that a technique which might appeal to a painterly sensibility.

This of course brings us to the question of why Twombly may have chosen this poem (cf. ill. 1). Nicholas Cullinan, discussing *Nini’s Paintings*, suggests that ‘It is noteworthy that death and aquatic imagery often seem to go together for Twombly. The myth of Hero and Leander, which has intermittently been a subject for him, or a painting of a boat that he has given to a close associate who was gravely ill, seem to link the two’.¹² The sense of loss inscribed at the heart of all myth, something to which Twombly has shown himself particularly sensitive, might therefore have helped recommend the choice of topic. Moreover, when asked to respond to a painting in the collection of the National Gallery, Twombly chose *The Fighting Téméraire*, so he will presumably have known that Turner had

¹⁰ George Gordon Lord Byron: *Written after swimming from Sestos to Abydos*. In: Frederick Page: Byron: *Poetical Works*. Oxford 1970, 59, ll. 1–4.

¹¹ Marlowe 2006, op. cit., ll. 557–58.

¹² Nicholas Cullinan: *Mourning and Melancholia: Nini’s Paintings*. In: London 2008, 137–139, 138.

painted a version of the parting of *Hero and Leander* (ill. 4), and indeed he had already treated the same subject both in 1962 (ill. 5) and more recently in a four-part painting (ills. 6.1–6.4), though the framed caption for what is effectively a triptych had made an explicit allusion to Keats's poem on the topic rather than to Marlowe's. This should further remind us that Twombly is known to have been interested in poetry: Tacita Dean notes that in a 1991 interview Twombly expressed his concern that 'Poetry was disappearing from our cultural consciousness ... No one recalled poetry as they used to; no one remembered lines from poems as they used to; it had become a waning art form', and suggests that 'Maybe Twombly is closer in his art to poets than to painters'.¹³ Indeed Nicholas Cullinan notes that 'Twombly has commented on his work: "I never really separated painting and literature because I've always used reference"'.¹⁴

Jonathan Jones and Jeremy Lewison both suggest a more specific connection. Jones observes in a comments forum on the Twombly-Poussin exhibition featuring *Hero and Leandro (To Christopher Marlowe)* that

The blood in his painting comes directly from Marlowe's verse. It is right there at the start of the poem, where Marlowe describes the blood-stained Hellespont. And this imagery of blood and water recurs in the lines that follow: Marlowe uses the image of the sea to suggest desire, and—being Marlowe—constantly menaces this oceanic eroticism with threats of blood and violence.¹⁵

For Lewison,

In his smaller, erotically charged painting, after Christopher Marlowe's poem, Twombly alludes to the roses strewn about Hero's floor, the gift of her virginity, represented by the runs of bloody paint that mingle with Leandro's sexual discharge, and her tears, a 'stream of liquid pearl, which down her face / Made milk-white paths' that eventually form the colour of the pearly sea. Leandro's name fades in and out of the tempest of marks.¹⁶

¹³ Dean 2008, 34 and 37.

¹⁴ Dulwich 2011, 17.

¹⁵ Online: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2011/jun/28/twombly-poussin-arcadian-painters-review> (12 October 2012).

¹⁶ Liverpool 2012, 84.



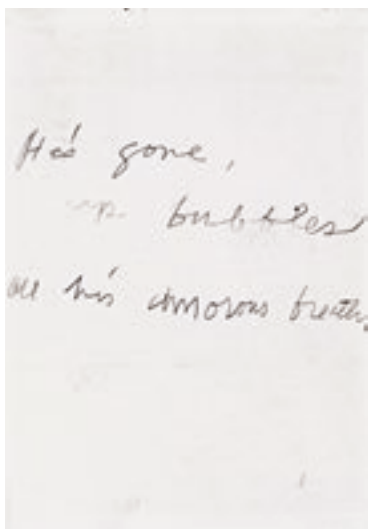
6.1 Cy Twombly: *Hero and Leandro*, Bassano in Teverina, 1984, 4 parts, Part I, oil paint, oil-based house paint, oil paint (paint stick) on canvas, 167.6 × 200.5 cm, Daros Collection, Switzerland



6.2 Cy Twombly: *Hero and Leandro*, 1984, Part II, oil-based house paint, oil paint, oil paint (paint stick) on canvas, 155.8 × 204.5 cm, Daros Collection, Switzerland



6.3 Cy Twombly: *Hero and Leandro*, 1984, Part III, oil-based house paint, oil paint on canvas, 156.2 × 204.5 cm, Daros Collection, Switzerland



6.4 Cy Twombly: *Hero and Leandro*, 1984, Part IV, lead pencil on paper, 42 × 29.5 cm, Daros Collection

Above all, though, the use of this poem chimes with Twombly's clearly established interest in mythology.¹⁷ *Fifty Days at Iliam* (1978) draws on the *Iliad*¹⁸, and Virgil is also a figure of deep interest for him: 'Only the sea, the gentle sea without secrets, the "classical Mediterranean" ... is present and speaks its own soliloquy ... the sea which we must see again and again with the eyes of Virgil'.¹⁹ Marlowe's own use of mythology is pervasive and distinctive, being a strongly developed feature of his work from what may have been the earliest thing he wrote, *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, to *Hero and Leander* itself, which was perhaps the last, and surfacing strongly in between in *Doctor Faustus*, *Edward II*, and the two parts of *Tamburlaine the Great*. Tacita Dean quotes Flaubert, 'Peu de gens devineront combien il a fallu être triste pour ressusciter Carthage'²⁰ and Marlowe is certainly sometimes sad: having first persuaded Aeneas to tell the tale of the fall of Troy Dido twice begs him to stop because she is made so sorrowful by it – 'O end, Aeneas! I can hear no more', 'I die with melting ruth; Aeneas, leave!';²¹ while it is impossible not to hear a genuine note of lament in the Chorus' words on the death of Dr Faustus, 'Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight, / And burnèd is Apollo's laurel bough' (Epilogue, 1–2).

However, the most characteristic note struck by Marlowe's use of mythology is irreverence: he typically invokes the gods either to mock and subvert them, or in order to smuggle in homoeroticism under the sign of cultural capital, as in the opening scene of *Edward II* where Gaveston muses,

Like sylvan nymphs my pages shall be clad;
 My men, like satyrs grazing on the lawns,
 Shall with their goat feet dance an antic hay.
 Sometime a lovely boy in Dian's shape,
 With hair that gilds the water as it glides,
 Crownets of pearl about his naked arms,
 And in his sportful hands an olive tree

¹⁷ See for instance Szeemann 1987, op. cit., 11.

¹⁸ Compare the contribution by Joachim Latacz in this book.

¹⁹ HB Poems, 3.

²⁰ Dean 2008, 37.

²¹ Christopher Marlowe: *The Complete Plays* (ed. Mark Thornton Burnett). London 1999, *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, II.i.243 and 289.

To hide those parts which men delight to see,
 Shall bathe him in a spring; and there, hard by,
 One like Actaeon, peeping through the grove,
 Shall by the angry goddess be transformed,
 And running in the likeness of an hart
 By yelping hounds pulled down and seem to die.
 Such things as these best please his majesty.²²

(I. i. 56–70)

The instrumentalism of Gaveston's use of the classics is abundantly apparent. On other occasions, mythology is evoked only to be debunked, perhaps the most notorious example of this being the opening scene of *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, in which Jupiter dandles his catamite Ganymede on his lap and gives him the jewels of his wife, Juno. When Tim Carroll directed the play at Shakespeare's Globe in summer 2003 he set it in a children's playground, with a set made up of a sandpit and slide, and the gods and goddesses, although played by adult actors, were infantilised by wearing shoes that were far too big for them. The clear implication was that these mighty beings of classical mythology were in reality no better than big children.

In this context, one might also speculate on why Twombly should have changed the name of the hero from Leander to Leandro. One obvious possibility is of course that he was dyslexic, as might be suggested by the presence of forms such as 'GOATHTHERD' in his writing (cf. p. 209, ill. 2). However, this is merely a speculation, and Richard Shiff points out that for Twombly

The conceptual meaning of words and letters sometimes resides in their visual form. For the ten-part cycle *Fifty Days at Ilium* 1978 (Philadelphia Museum of Art), Twombly chose to spell Ilium as *Iliam* to introduce the shape of an A, which he regards as having 'a phallic aggression ... I wanted the A for Achilles'.²³

In the case of the change from 'Leander' to 'Leandro', the emphasis falls chiefly on the 'o' which is both the sound of lament and the visual embodiment of the completed circle, the returning to the primal sea whose

²² Ibid., *Edward II*, I.i.56–70.

²³ Richard Shiff: *Charm*. In: London 2008, 26.

foam, in Greek mythology, was created when the castrated genitals of Ouranos were cast into the sea and in turn created Venus, goddess of love, whose priestess Hero was. For both Marlowe and Twombly, then, mythology is a site of loss and lack.

Hero and Leander, like Twombly's own work, is also deeply interested in color. Both Tacita Dean and Harald Szeemann comment on Twombly's use of white in particular.²⁴ White and red, the standard terms of Petrarchan poetry, are both important in *Hero and Leander*. The opening line is 'On Hellespont, guilty of true love's blood', and blood is repeatedly recurred to thereafter. Venus' temple includes images of 'Blood-quaffing Mars, heaving the iron net / Which limping Vulcan and his Cyclops set; / Love kindling fire, to burn such towns as Troy' (ll. 151–3), and Hero within it was at the altar 'sacrificing turtles' blood' (l. 158); later, Neptune wounds himself with his own mace when it recoils on him and causes a 'fresh bleeding wound' (l. 697). Red also comes from other sources when

Now had the Morn espied her lover's steeds,
Whereat she starts, puts on her purple weeds,
And red for anger that he stayed so long,
All headlong throws herself the clouds among.
(ll. 571–74)

White, meanwhile, is associated with both Hero and Leander. In line with Elizabethan requirements for beauty, our first introduction to Hero stresses her whiteness:

She ware no gloves, for neither sun nor wind
Wouls burn or parch her hands, but to her mind
Or warm or cool them, for they took delight
To play upon those hands, they were so white.
(ll. 27–30)

More unusually for Renaissance writers in general, though not for Marlowe, is the fact that Leander too is described in terms of his impeccable whiteness:

²⁴ Dean 2008, 40; Szeemann 1987, op. cit., 10.

Even as delicious meat is to the taste,
 So was his neck in touching, and surpassed
 The white of Pelops' shoulder. I could tell ye
 How smooth his breast was, and how white his belly,
 And whose immortal fingers did imprint
 That heavenly path with many a curious dint,
 That runs along his back, but my rude pen
 Can hardly blazon forth the loves of men,
 Much less of powerful gods.

(ll. 63–71)

Hero is also associated with silver, first when we hear of the 'silver tincture of her cheeks' (ll. 396) and later when 'as her silver body downward went, / With both her hands she made the bed a tent' (ll. 747–8).

A matter of some debate among Marlowe scholars is the question of whether *Hero and Leander* is in fact finished. On the face of it, there is considerable evidence to suggest that it is. Plague closed the playhouses on 28 January 1593, so it would not have been surprising for Marlowe to take to writing poetry instead as a means of earning his bread, and the fact that he was killed five months later, on 30 May 1593, might seem sufficient reason for the fact that the poem appears to break off *in medias res*, the last sentence being

By this Apollo's golden harp began
 To sound forth music to the Ocean,
 Which watchful Hesperus no sooner heard,
 But he the day's bright-bearing car prepared,
 And ran before, as harbinger of light,
 And with his flaring beams mocked ugly Night,
 Till she, o'ercome with anguish, shame, and rage,
 Danged down to hell her loathsome carriage.

(ll. 811–18)

The words which follow this, '*Desunt nonnulla*', mean literally 'There is something missing' and would seem to confirm that Marlowe had intended to write more than this. However, there has been a counter-argument that Marlowe had in fact finished the poem or that there is at the very least room for speculation that if he had continued the narrative he would not have developed it along the traditional lines but might for

instance have contemplated an ending in which Leander did not drown²⁵ (whether that would count as a 'happy ending' or not would of course depend on whether he and Hero were happy together or whether the element of homoeroticism introduced in the encounter of Leander and Neptune might have struck a rather jarring note). One might perhaps compare this with some of the accusations levelled at Twombly by sceptics, not least the fairly frequently found comment that what he does is not skilled and is not 'proper art'. Moreover, one thing that is clear is that George Chapman did not think it was finished, since he provided a continuation, and part of Chapman's translation of the *Iliad* was published as *Achilles' Shield*, a phrase also used by Twombly, so the connection with one Elizabethan poet may well have drawn his attention to the other: a genealogy could readily be traced from Chapman's continuation of Marlowe's poem through his independent *Achilles' Shield* to Pope, another poet in whom Twombly was interested, and it would also branch out to include Keats, who wrote of *On first looking into Chapman's Homer* and to whom Twombly's 1984 version of the Hero and Leander story pays homage (cf. ill. 6.4).

Finally I would like to speculate a little on the title of Twombly's painting. Why 'To Christopher Marlowe'? Perhaps it is a simple dedication, but could it perhaps also suggest an attempt to swim towards a subject position occupied by Christopher Marlowe? In this context it would seem worth noting that Marlowe is strongly identified with homosexuality, not least because he is alleged to have said that 'All they that love not tobacco and boys are fools', and indeed Leander himself is caught between the heterosexuality of his relationship with Hero and the obvious homosexuality of Neptune's attraction to him. There has been considerable speculation about Twombly's own sexuality;²⁶ for an artist who grew up in an age when homosexuality was illegal allusion to Marlowe and

25 See for instance Marion Campbell: 'Desunt Nonnulla': The Construction of Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* as an Unfinished Poem. In: *English Literary History* 51 (1984), 241–268 and, William Leigh Godshalk: *Hero and Leander*: The Sense of an Ending. In: Kenneth Friedenreich / Roma Gill / Constance Brown Kuriyama: *A Poet and a Filthy Playmaker*: *New Essays on Christopher Marlowe*. New York 1988, 293–314.

26 See for instance http://www.iconoduel.org/archives/2006/06/000782_the_queer_eye_of_that_slate_guy_revisited.php or <http://www.cnvill.net/mfmassi.htm> (both 12 October 2012).

the figure of Leander might, perhaps, represent a struggle for identity, a struggle against forces much larger than oneself, against which there could in the end be no victory, and certainly the Exhibition Guide for the 2012 'Turner, Monet, Twombly' exhibition at Tate Liverpool declared that in the 1985 painting *Wilder Shores of Love*, which uses a very similar palette to *Hero and Leandro* and also echoes its wave shape, Twombly 'refers back to his own trip in 1952 to North Africa, in the company of Robert Rauschenberg, and memories of sexual freedom'. On the face of it, classical mythology is the most respectable subject possible, and yet for Marlowe what it spoke of is 'heady riots, incests, rapes' (l. 144)—in short, 'deviant' sexuality.

Altogether, then, one can find a number of points of comparison between Twombly's painting and Marlowe's poem. Both are shadowed by fears of death and change, change being indeed implicit in the very shape and motif of the wave. Both Hero's kirtle and Twombly's painting are stained with blood, and both are interested too in color more generally, particularly the contrast between, and associations of, silver, red and white. Both draw on mythology, but for both that provides a note of elegy and loss rather than the reassurance of a belief system. Finally, both engage the question of how much the author or artist needs to do to control the meaning of the work and how far he is safe to let the reader or spectator supplement it with his own imagination and interpretation, without the risk of its being criticised as unfinished, and both too raise questions about the relationship between the life and works of the artist.

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1 Cy Twombly: *Woodland Glade (to Poussin)*, Rome, 1960, lead pencil, wax crayon, oil paint on canvas, 200 × 256 cm, Private Collection

HENRY KEAZOR

“... AND THEN GOES OFF TO SOMEWHERE ELSE”: CY TWOMBLY AND NICOLAS POUSSIN

The exhibition *Twombly and Poussin: Arcadian Painters*, held at the Dulwich Picture Gallery from June 29 to September 25, 2011, presented, along with its catalog, an interesting experiment. By juxtaposing apparently contrary painters from different countries and centuries, Plutarch's *Vitae Parallelae* concept was put to a difficult test. In his comprehensive work presenting 23 pairs of biographies, the antique author had juxtaposed the lives of pairs of famous Greek and Roman men deemed comparable to one another based on certain details. He did this so that the vita of one (the Roman) would gain plasticity and be thrown into relief when reflected in the biography of the other (the Greek).¹ The exhibition in Dulwich seemed to be striving for a similar effect, which is why the press releases and the accompanying catalog started off by counting the parallels between Poussin and Twombly: In 1624/1957, the respective artists were drawn to Rome at “around the age of thirty,”² one from France and the other from America. Each would then proceed to spend the greater part of his life in the Eternal City, where both sought the company of other foreign artists. Over time, they each became “the pre-eminent painters of their day,”³ finding life-long inspiration in the antique heritage of Rome as fuel for their “prodigious talent.”⁴

1 Regarding Plutarch and his biographies in general, cf: Christopher Brendan Reginald Pelling: Plutarchos, II, Biographien, B: Parallelbiographien. In: *Der Neue Pauly*, Vol. 9, Stuttgart 2000, 1160–1164.

2 Dulwich 2011, 17.

3 Ibid., 18.

4 According to the Dulwich Picture Gallery press release preceding the exhibition—cf. e.g. Nicholas Cullinan's announcement from 1 June 2011 on the website for “Apollo” magazine: <http://www.apollo-magazine.com/features/6988988/visions-of-arcadia.shtml> (last access: 22.11.2012).

The two were supposedly also closely affiliated in light of their chosen themes: Poussin and Twombly both gave expression to their love for nature, poetry, mythology, and history in their works, and to that end each of them acquired a broad knowledge of literature and poetry that would stand behind their pastoral paintings and depictions of landscapes, among other things. In so doing, each also worked unceasingly to improve the technical aspects of the art of painting.⁵

It is left open as to whether or not one can suspect a specifically calculated intention on the part of Twombly there, but the American painter began creating his London version of the *Four Seasons* at the age of 67, almost the same as the age of 66 with which his model Poussin had done and with whom in this respect, too, parallels were acknowledged.⁶ “I would’ve liked to have been Poussin, if I’d had a choice, in another time,” the eighty-year-old Twombly is quoted as saying in an interview from 2008.⁷

As early as 1960, the American artist had indeed begun to create paintings and drawings that, in various ways, more or less directly, allude to Poussin, quoting him, paying homage to him. “Caught somewhere between rebus and ruin, Twombly thus regenerates the potential of allegory to speak to the contemporary viewer as Poussin had done before him,” James Hall pointed out in an August 2011 exhibition discussion that elucidated the possible relationship between the two artists for the audience⁸: Is Twombly, then, a revitalizer of an early modern pictorial language that has grown alien to us, translating it into the idiom of contemporary art that we find comprehensible?

This means, however, that there must also be clear differences between the two artists, and the catalog accordingly attempts to formulate them: Both (of course) were shaped by very different times, which makes it far from surprising that their stylistic appearances are so disparate: The catalog author Nicholas Cullinan even goes so far as to say they are “polar opposites” in this respect.⁹ Here, too, Hall sharpens this point of

5 Ibid.

6 Dulwich 2011, 154, Nos. 37–40, where an interpretation of Poussin’s *Four Seasons* by Anthony Blunt is noted with the words: “Twombly seems to be in accord with this schema [...]”

7 Dulwich 2011, 73.

8 James Hall: Cy Twombly in Rome. In: *The Times Literary Supplement*, 23.8.2011, online at: <http://www.the-tls.co.uk/tls/public/article760298.ece> (last access: 21.11.2012).

9 Dulwich 2011, 19.

view by allowing Poussin to wander out of view as a model for Twombly: “If we are looking for a classical source for Twombly’s art, the best bet is not the hypertense Roman Doric of Poussin, but rather Pompeian wall painting, with its dreamy Arcadian landscapes and casual, gravity-free compositions. Ancient wall painting had scarcely been discovered in Poussin’s day (apart from grotesque decoration).”¹⁰

It is thus a sort of dialectical gaze that can be gleaned from the relationship of both painters and then applied to the examination of their respective works: Viewed from the lens of Twombly’s engagement with him, the Frenchman’s work can offer up new aspects; conversely, the American’s creations, seen through the lens of his selected Poussin inspirations, can also be freshly examined.

The question remains, however, if this had actually happened—the reaction of most audience members, regardless of whether they were experts or not, tended to be more oppositional than dialectic: It would have been appreciated, as Hall once again put it, that Poussin had been taken out of his “museumological comfort zone,” but the confrontation with Twombly’s works hadn’t done him any good. “Twombly’s paintings,” he writes, “mostly behave like artistic suicide bombers: they destroy Poussin and themselves. I searched in vain for meaningful points of contact—for the artist named Twoussin.”¹¹

But was such a conflation with Poussin Twombly’s intention at all?

Certainly: If one takes Twombly’s reference to the Frenchman and his works seriously (instead of writing them off as senseless, pointless, or even vain namedropping), the search for an approach to Poussin using various strategies becomes apparent.

First of all, there is the dedication in the title of the first work that referred to Poussin, *Woodland Glade (to Poussin)*, from 1960 (ill. 1).¹² So how does such an artistic dedication function—how is it supposed to function? Such dedications, honors, and consecrations are familiar from

¹⁰ Hall 2011, op. cit.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Cf. HB I 134 and Dulwich 2011, 15. The series with the title referring to Poussin continued the following year with *Empire of Flora* (Berlin, Collection Marx) and *Triumph of Galatea* (Private Collection); they seem to allude to the correspondingly titled Poussin paintings in Dresden (Staatliche Gemäldesammlungen) or in Philadelphia (Museum of Art—today also referred to *Triumph of Neptune*). On Twombly’s paintings, cf. HB II 7 and 19.

literature, where forms and motivations for these types of dedications show a great range: from the plain, direct mention of the recipient of the dedication to stylistic appropriations intended as an homage; from those with a financial motivation (at times, a dedication was tied to the expectation of a monetary gift from the grateful recipient) to pure reverence.¹³

Looking at Twombly's *Woodland Glade (to Poussin)*, the latter seems to stand behind the work because, at first sight, there doesn't seem to be any direct relationship between the American's pond surrounded by green shrubs and Poussin's painting—or does there? After all, the theme emphasized in the title—a forest clearing—is somewhat reminiscent of the setting for several Arcadian scenes by Poussin.¹⁴

Looking at two additional examples, one finds other varieties of reference and begins to see something resembling a common thread: In *Bacchanalia—Fall (5 days in November)* from 1977 (ill. 2), Twombly pastes a reproduction of a preliminary sketch by Poussin (ill. 3)¹⁵ for his 1636 *Triumph of Pan* (London, National Gallery) into his composition.¹⁶ In contrast to *Woodland Glade (to Poussin)*, the honored painter doesn't appear by name in the title, but the appellation *Bacchanalia* evokes, among other things, the series of four bacchanals Poussin painted for Cardinal Richelieu in 1636, one of which was *Triumph of Pan*, quoted here by Twombly with the attached reproduction of the preliminary sketch. To be sure, he did not simply mount this sepia-toned illustration on his backing paper; instead, he simultaneously exhibited and concealed it. On top of the reproduction, Twombly laid a half-transparent graph paper that

13 Cf. for an overview: Volker Kaukoreit / Marcel Atze / Michael Hansel (Ed.): *“Aus meiner Hand dies Buch”. Zum Phänomen der Widmung*. Vienna 2007 (= Sichtungen. Archive, Library, Literaturwissenschaft 8./9., 2005/2006).

14 On p. 16 with ill. 2, Dulwich 2011 shows, as a contrast to Twombly's *Woodland Glade (to Poussin)*, Poussin's *Landscape with Diogenes* from 1648 (Paris, Louvre), which admittedly seems unconvincing as a close comparison because there is no forest glade but rather a river and not (as Twombly defined with the description of “pool”) a lake. In this respect, the comparisons suggested in texts such as Leeman 2004, 109—to Poussin's *Landscape with a Man Killed by a Snake* (1648, London, National Gallery) or *Landscape with a Calm* from 1650/51 (Malibu, Getty Museum)—are more convincing, even if the respective lakes are not situated in a forest glade.

15 Pierre Rosenberg / Louis-Antoine Prat: *Nicolas Poussin 1594–1665*. Catalogue raisonné des dessins, 2 vols. Milan 1994, vol. I, 170–171, no. 94.

16 On the Poussin painting and its context cf. Jacques Thuillier: *Nicolas Poussin*. Paris 1994, 254, no. 112; on Twombly cf. Dulwich 2011, 146, no. 32.



2 Cy Twombly: *Bacchanalia—Fall (5 days in November)*, Rome, 1977, collage: (reproduction of a drawing by Nicolas Poussin, graph paper, transparent adhesive tape), oil paint, wax crayon, lead pencil, 101.2 × 150.5 cm, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich, Udo and Anette Brandhorst Foundation, Museum Brandhorst



3 Nicolas Poussin: Preliminary sketch for *Triumph of Pan*, ca. 1635/36, Windsor Castle, Royal Library inv. No RL 11995

blurs the contours of the drawing behind its rigorous sequence of grids and the cloudy texture of the paper. Below it, the artist wrote the title *Bacchanalia*, underneath which a rising tempest of expressive tangles of strokes in brown, white, and black is then unleashed just to the lower right side.

As a result, the composition can be understood as the arrangement of an antagonism: Above, the preliminary sketch for Poussin's *Bacchanal*, admittedly in the medium of a smooth, alienating photographic reproduction; on the other hand, it lies behind the grid of a piece of murky graph paper. This can also be understood as a reference to the function of the reproduced drawing: The paper depicts the final stage of a long compositional process of discovery regarding Poussin, culminating in the transfer of the found arrangement of shapes onto the canvas, a step for which the preliminary sketch is often squared in order to facilitate its scaled enlargement onto the ultimate picture base. With the reinforcement of this squaring from the pattern of the graph paper, Twombly is perhaps ironically playing on Poussin's self-professed emphasis on accuracy ("*J'ai rien négligé*," he once said)¹⁷ as well as on the fact that the Frenchman created an implicit contradiction with his *Triumph of Pan*: The depiction of the wild, orgiastic activities of a few satyrs and nymphs around a herma of Pan was the result of a highly rigorous and disciplined compositional process¹⁸, and for that reason the resulting picture was often criticized as having too cool, lacquered, stiff, and controlled a layout and texture to communicate a credible and consistent impression of a wild bacchanal.¹⁹ The graph paper Twombly superimposed upon the sketch could be a play on that type of criticism. At the same time, he counteracts Poussin's squared creation by venting such an unleashing with the help of a wild, expressive tangle of strokes, executed in colors which are visible below the graph paper and chromatically in tune with the reproduced drawing: Instead of following the model of Poussin's preliminary sketch, Twombly opposes its documented discipline with its painterly antipode. Finally, the word "Fall" written next to the clouds of color looming from the upper

17 *Mélanges d'histoire et de littérature recueillis par M. de Vigneul-Marville*. Rouen 1699/1700, vol. I., 140.

18 Cf. Henry Keazor: *Poussins Pargera. Quellen, Entwicklung und Bedeutung der Kleinkompositionen in den Gemälden Nicolas Poussins*. Regensburg 1998, 66–88.

19 Cf. e.g. Pierre Rosenbergs dictum about the "sensualité figée" of Richelieu bacchanals.—Cf. Pierre Rosenberg: *Nicolas Poussin 1594–1665*. Paris 1994, 226, no. 54.

left to the right could have more than one meaning—either naming the autumnal season or signifying a plunge. As to the latter, the fall could relate to the satyr who has collapsed to floor from intoxication, or it could refer to the role model of Poussin plunging out of control.

But *Bacchanalia—Fall (5 days in November)* is just the final part of an entire series comprising a total of four paintings, in which Twombly varies the collage principle while making use of reproductions of some of Poussin's (preliminary) drawings: In *Bacchanalia—Fall (5 days in October)*, he sticks a study (Paris, Louvre)²⁰ by the Frenchman for his painting *Rinaldo and Armida* (Berlin, Gemäldegalerie) in the middle of a page, thereby hinting at, possibly, the burning passion felt by the sorceress Armida for Rinaldo, the knight she had put into a stupor; in *Bacchanalia—Winter (5 days in February)*, it is the reproduction of Poussin's draught for *Extreme Unction* (Paris, Louvre)²¹ that is presented this way (thus drawing the association between the end of life and the coldest season)²², while in *Bacchanalia—Winter (5 days in January)* (actually

20 Rosenberg/Prat 1994, op. cit., vol. I, 262, no. 135; cf. in addition the notation on the backside, p. 217, ill. 7.

21 Ibid., vol. I, 488, no. 248.

22 On the connection between winter and the end of time, cf., among others: Oskar Bätschmann: Nicolas Poussins 'Winter-Sintflut': Jahreszeit oder Ende der Geschichte? In: *Zeitschrift für Schweizerische Archäologie und Kunstgeschichte*, vol. 52/1 (1995), 38–48. Leeman 2004, op. cit., 277 sees the picture rather as a sign that, for Twombly, "Bacchus aurait donc autant à voir avec Éros (...) qu'avec Thanatos comme le dit très concrètement l'intrusion d'une *Extrême-onction* de Poussin dans *Bacchanalia—Winter (5 days in Feb.)*, la référence à Poussin faisant de cette ensemble une sorte d'"in bacchanalibus ego" twomblyenne." To the extent that, in the *Bacchanalia* series, Twombly gathers figures from Poussin that are connected with love (*Fall*: Rinaldo and Armida), erotic beauty (*Winter*: Venus), intoxication (*Fall*: Bacchanal) and death (*Winter*: Extreme Unction), one can agree with Leeman that Bacchus, Eros and Thanatos are being placed in relation to one another here—Leeman's phrase "*in bacchanalibus ego*" nevertheless perhaps misplaces a little the gaze upon the entire series to the extent that it places the emphasis on the combination of intoxication and death and allows the second theme of the series, the seasons of fall and winter, to slip out of view. The relation of these individual figures to the overarching seasonal themes are nevertheless to be sought—and doing so will demonstrate that Twombly associates intoxication and love with autumn, death and erotic beauty with winter, so that both seasons are to a certain extent cast in classical terms: Intoxication and love, the elements defining autumn, are framed by the pairing of Eros and Thanatos, traditionally standing for winter and which can

in contrast to the cold subject given in the title), it is a reproduction of Poussin's drawing with the *Venus at the Fountain* (Paris, Louvre)²³ that Twombly uses. As much as the *Triumph of Pan*, with its wine-besotted celebration of the forest god Pan, and the stunned Rinaldo are suited to autumn, and the dying man receiving extreme unction is appropriate to winter, the combination of winter and a naked Venus standing at a fountain seems paradoxical—inasmuch as one would prefer not to make use of Terence's adage “Sine Cerere et Baccho friget Venus,”²⁴ with which not only the overall title of *Bacchanalia* would again be invoked but also a reference to *Triumph of Pan* with its bacchanalian motifs.

Twombly thus shows a rather overt affinity to his inspirations and guiding principles by integrating them into the form of a collage as reproductions in his works; he then reestablishes great distance from his model, for example, with the assistance of the superimposition of filtering media such as the graph paper, but especially, however, by means of his expressive, artistic handwriting that emancipates itself from figuration. It nonetheless becomes clear that precisely in this distance, one should occasionally (certainly not always) perceive the implicit point of reference and the sought-after tension and incorporate the understanding of such creations by Twombly: One can by all means take in *Autunno* (from *Quattro Stagioni*) from 1993/95 (ill. 4), for example, without necessarily thinking of Poussin.²⁵ All the same, the very title of the entire series could refer to Poussin's *Four Seasons* (Paris, Louvre) from 1660/64; moreover, a potential interpretation opens up in the blood-red atmosphere of

also be understood as the poles of the bacchanals (with their intoxicated/sensual drives that eventually escalate towards death). At the same time, Twombly links the themes of autumn and winter via Venus, associated with winter and freezing without Bacchus (see fn. 24).

23 Rosenberg/Prat 1994, op. cit., vol. I, 706–707, no. 366.

24 The sentence stems from Terence's romantic comedy *The Eunuch*, in which Chremes, in the fifth scene of act 4 (l. 732) tells Pythias: “*Verbum hercle hoc verum erit 'sine Cerere et Libero friget Venus'*” (English: “By Hercules, the adage is true: ‘Without Ceres and wine, Venus is cold’”). For context in art history, cf. Berthold Hinz: ... *non iam friget*—Jordaens blickt auf Rubens. In: Bruno Klein / Harald Wolter-von dem Knesebeck (Ed.): *Nobilis arte manus. Festschrift zum 70. Geburtstag von Antje Middeldorf Kosegarten* (2nd edition, amended). Dresden/Kassel 2002, 380–394, here esp. 393, fn. 21.

25 On the painting, cf. HB IV 64, Dulwich 2011, 154–155, no. 39 and Greub 2013a.

agglomerated knots of color if one simply thinks of the *Autumn* picture (ill. 5) from his *Seasons*. In Twombly's painting, where one finds balls of color reminiscent of wine or blood²⁶, there's a gigantic vine in Poussin's depiction of *Autumn*, just taken away by Moses' scouts.²⁷ This would open up an additional dimension of interpretation, because Twombly is reading Poussin here, so to speak, against the biblical grain—placing the vine purely in its antique association with Bacchus (and—see the inscription “Pan/panic” in Twombly's painting—with the forest and shepherd god Pan, or the “panic” he instills) and thus opening a layer of meaning in Poussin's depiction for which one was perhaps at first blind because of the apparently clear source text from the Old Testament: Seen in this light, it gradually appears as if one could read fear and panic in the faces of the two scouts hurrying through the landscape, apparently fearful of the countryside's denizens, the giant sons of Anak, for whom the scouts appear as tiny and greedy as locusts.²⁸

This interpretation interlocking antiquity with the Old Testament is further reflected in the inscription “Et in Arcadia Ego” in Twombly's painting; he thereby invokes not only the title of one of Poussin's most famous paintings (Paris, Louvre) but, additionally, the Old Testament story that the scouts of Moses were supposed to bring back the vine as proof of having found the Promised Land: the land of milk and honey, a kind of second paradise²⁹ corresponding, on a profane, antique level, to the idylls of Arcadia, from which (according to a demonstrably wrong

26 Dulwich 2011, 154 makes reference to a photograph in Twombly's atelier from this time, a time in which he was working on *Quattro Stagioni*. One can see a note on the photo; a brief quotation from the seventh sonnet of Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus* can be seen on the note. The original reads: “[...] Sein Herz, o vergängliche Kelter / eines den Menschen unendlichen Weins.” Twombly's version is: “His mortal heart / presses out / an inexhaustible / wine,” picking up on the central parallels of blood and wine.

27 Regarding the textual basis, cf. the account in 4. Moses, 13, 23–26. Regarding the painting, cf. Thuillier 1994, op. cit., 264, no. 236.

28 Cf. 4. Moses (Numbers), 13, 22 and 28, where the scouts are quoted as having said: “We saw the children of Anak there,” explained further in 33: “And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.”

29 Cf. the description of the Promised Land in the Old Testament (2. Moses, 3, 8 and 17 as well as 4. Moses, 13, 27) and the description of paradise in the Qur'an, for example: Sura 47, 15.



4 Cy Twombly: *Quattro Stagioni*, Bassano in Teverina/Gaeta, 4 parts, Part III: *Autunno*, 1993–1995, acrylic, oil paint (crayon), wax crayon, colored pencil on canvas, 313.6 × 215 cm, London, Tate



5 Nicolas Poussin: *Autumn* (from *Four Seasons*), oil on canvas, 116 × 160 cm, 1660/64, Paris, Louvre

interpretation of “Et in Arcadia Ego” going back to André Félibien) the “Ego” must bid adieu.³⁰

It seems, then, as if Twombly, one way or another, had Poussin’s *Four Seasons* in mind when painting *Quattro Stagioni* and, as a result, incorporated references into his paintings. The choice of parallel titles was meant to make the viewer sensitive to this, inviting the viewer to consider both works in a kind of comparative overview.³¹

One must however emphasize that the formal relationship between the *Quattro Stagioni* and Poussin’s *Seasons* is certainly looser than that between

30 In his original statement, which can, for example, be found in Guercino’s painted interpretation from 1618 (Rome, Palazzo Corsini), Death is saying, “Even here in Arcadia, I exist—Death.” According to a few interpretations, Poussin’s second take on the subject in the field of painting from 1638/39 (Paris, Louvre) had, as a result of its elegiac character, advanced the interpretation that not death but rather someone who had passed away is speaking—“I, too, once lived in Arcadia.” Cf. the summary discussion in Rosenberg 1994, op. cit., 284–285, no. 93.

31 Cf. Greub 2013a.

Bacchanalia—Fall and Poussin's *Triumph of Pan*, for example, or between Twombly's *School of Athens* from 1961 or 1964 and Raphael's fresco *The School of Athens* in the Stanza della Segnatura in the Vatican from 1510/11.³²

And yet references via titles, compositional schemata, or borrowed themes do not yet exhaust the spectrum of Twombly's potential allusions to Poussin—a consideration of the texture of both painters' working surface is informative here. The American's paintings—and herein certainly lies a problem stemming from his reception by means of “flat” photo reproductions—display, alongside their expressive traces of painting and drawing, a pronounced haptic quality: It is not just that the paint at times gathers on the canvas's surface in scabs and clumps, but one can also repeatedly observe streaks of color applied with fingers or even entire handprints.³³ Here, too, Twombly can be compared to Poussin, who, in his painting from 1638/40, *A Dance to the Music of Time* (ill. 6), clearly had a (literal) hand in the priming of the painting with (probably) his (left) thumbs, leaving a mark on it in order to create a rich and differentiated texture for the image (ills. 7–8).³⁴ One grows all the more sensitive to this (admittedly for Poussin, rather rare) practice after examining the works of Twombly, who took such interventions with paint even further and repeatedly seems to have orchestrated a downright argument between the surface and the sublime.

In conclusion, to return again to the literary level already invoked by the genre of the dedication, let us introduce yet another two factors into the field. In 1976, Roland Barthes, in *Non Multa Sed Multum*, wrote about Twombly as follows (the philosopher always referred to him as ‘TW’): “A painting by TW consists only of what one might call writing's *field of allusions*. [...] TW makes a reference to writing [...] and then goes off to somewhere else.”³⁵ This can also be said in relation to Twombly's recourse and reference to Poussin, because here, too, the American artist seems to create a “field of allusions” and “makes reference [...] and then goes off to somewhere else.”

32 Regarding Twombly's paintings, *School of Athens* (Italy, Private Collection) and *School of Athens II* (Cologne, Museum Ludwig) cf. HB II 14 and 164.

33 As one example among many, cf. Twombly's *Study from the Temeraire* (New South Wales, Art Gallery) from 1998/99—also cf. HB V 1.

34 Cf. Richard Beresford: *A Dance to the Music of Time by Nicolas Poussin*. London 1995, 34.

35 Quoted in: Del Roscio 2002, 88–101, here 88.



6 Nicolas Poussin: *A Dance to the Music of Time*, 1638/40, oil on canvas, 83 × 105 cm, London, Wallace Collection

Regarding the Twombly/Poussin relationship, one can thus learn a great deal from the debate about the so-called “fidelity” of literary cinema that has for so long been conducted in literary circles: Given that literature and film follow utterly different aesthetic principles, it makes little sense—in the context of the awareness of the genre specifications summoned in 1766 by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*—to stick such literary adaptations in the Procrustean bed of constant comparison with the literary source and then rate them according to their degree of “fidelity” towards the latter.³⁶

³⁶ Cf., among others, Hans Magnus Enzensberger: *Literatur und Linse – und Beweis dessen, daß ihre glückhafte Kopulation derzeit unmöglich ist*. In: *Akzente* (1956), vol. 3, 207–213; Wolfram Buddecke / Jörg Hienger: *Verfilmte Literatur. Probleme der Transformation und der Popularisierung*. In: *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik* 9 (1979), vol. 36, 12–30; Franz-Josef Albersmeier / Volker Roloff (Ed.): *Literaturverfilmungen*. Frankfurt a.M. 1989 and Irmela Schneider: *Der verwandelte Text. Wege zu einer Theorie der Literaturverfilmung*. Tübingen 1981.



7 Detail of ill. 6, Nicolas Poussin: *A Dance to the Music of Time*, 1638/40, London, Wallace Collection



8 Obliquely lit picture of a detail from Nicolas Poussin: *A Dance to the Music of Time*, 1638/40, London, Wallace Collection

It makes equally little sense, in Twombly's case, to constantly want to consider Poussin's paintings as binding blueprints for Twombly's works: If one looks at *Morte a Venezia*, Luchino Visconti's 1971 film adaptation of Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, one also does not expect to find the work of a director who would like to be perceived as "Thochino Masconti"; in this respect, one also should not expect to encounter an artist who can be addressed as "Twoussin" in the Dulwich exhibition. Certainly, with his ongoing references to Raphael and Poussin, Twombly is inviting us to view and understand a few of his works in regard to their relation to both early modern artists (this is also perhaps a mischievous trap that

he's setting for art historians); as a result, certain nuances of understanding may be lost if one completely dismisses these allusions. Here, too, an equivalent exists in the debate on literary adaptations because the pendulum in Anglo-American countries swung back to the opposite extreme in the early 2000s³⁷: The virtues of the opposite of "fidelity" were preached. In the field of "Adaptation Studies," one repeatedly found formulations of the goal "to free our notion of film adaptations from this dependency on literature so that adaptations are not derided as sycophantic, derivative, and therefore inferior to their literary counterparts."³⁸ This, however, led to the result that, in the critical and general aversion to the concept of "fidelity," any connection between a film and its literary source material was viewed as irrelevant because the separate significance of the film was automatically limiting. To put it in concrete terms: One pretended as if film adaptations of literature did not actually have any source material by ignoring it, opting to view the films that were based on such material exclusively as autonomous and new creations. To that extent, this of course severely constrains one's perspective; as a result of such an approach, it is precisely the creative emancipation and accomplishment of the adaptation that one no longer knows how to appreciate, because those qualities can only be understood and appreciated by virtue of a comparison with the literary source material. Moreover, one may also be hindered in distinguishing the autonomous aspects, the potential, and also the limitations of the two distinct genres because each can only become clear when being compared with one another.

The same holds true for any consideration of Twombly's work that deliberately overlooks and ignores the references he makes, because the aforementioned "allusions" and "references" that Twombly apparently liked to use now and then as a point of departure to "[go] off to somewhere else" would thereby be rendered mute.

37 Regarding the development, cf. Irina Rajewesky: *Intermedialität*. Tübingen/Basel 2002, 29–58; Kamilla Elliott: *Rethinking the Novel / Film Debate*. Cambridge 2003; Susan Fellerman: *Art in the Cinematic Imagination*. Austin 2006; Julie Sanders: *Adaptation and Appropriation*. London 2006 and Monika Seidl: Framing Colin: The Adaptation of Classics and Colin Firth as Mr. Darcy and after Mr. Darcy. In: Werner Huber / Evelyne Keitel / Gunter Süss (Eds.): *Intermedialities. New Perspectives on Literature and the Media*. Trier 2007, 37–49.

38 Cf. Deborah Cartmell / Imelda Whelehan (Eds.): *The Cambridge Companion to Literature on Screen*. Cambridge 2007, 1–2.

ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

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3 Royal Collection Trust / © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2017.

5 Paris, Musée du Louvre.

6-8 London, Wallace Collection (Exhib. cat., op. cit., Cover [ill. 6], p. 10 [ill. 7], p. 36 [ill. 8]).



1 Cy Twombly: *Untitled*, Gaeta, 2007, acrylic, wax crayon, lead pencil on wooden panel, 252 × 552 cm, New York, Collection Donald B. and Catherine C. Marron

YOSHINOBU HAKUTANI

CY TWOMBLY'S PAINTING OF THE PEONIES AND HAIKU IMAGERY

On Cy Twombly's painting of the five peonies, *Untitled* from 2007 (ill. 1), are inscribed English translations of five haiku by Masaoka Shiki (1867–1902), Kobayashi Issa (1763–1827), Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694), Yosa Buson (1716–1783), and Takarai Kikaku (1661–1707), respectively.¹ Twombly chose the five haiku on peonies by these poets. They were well-known, influential haiku poets in Japanese history. In particular, Bashō (17th century), Buson (18th century), Issa (18th–19th century), and Shiki (19th–20th century), each representing a century, have been regarded as haiku masters. Kikaku, on the other hand, is known as Bashō's contemporary and his first disciple, who distinguished himself in innovating in the art of haiku.

Haiku, the Japanese verse of seventeen syllables, was derived from the *waka* (Japanese song), the oldest verse form of thirty-one syllables, written vertically in five parts (5–7–5–7–7). The haiku form thus corresponds to the first three parts of the *waka*. This seventeen-syllable verse form had been maintained by noblemen, courtiers, and high-ranked samurai since the thirteenth century. By 1680, when Bashō wrote the first version of his celebrated haiku on the frog jumping into the water, “the old pond / a frog jumped into / the sound of the water,” haiku had become a highly stylized expression of poetic vision. Bashō's haiku, unlike those of his predecessors, represented a new perspective and did not rely on the ingenious play on words often seen in *renga* (linked song). Bashō, his

¹ At the time of the Congress it was assumed that the haiku inscribed on the first four peonies from left to right were attributed to Bashō. Thanks to Thierry Greub's investigations, however, it has turned out that only the haiku inscribed on the third peony is by Bashō, and that the haiku inscribed on the first, second, and fourth peonies are by Shiki, Issa, and Buson, respectively.

contemporaries, and the later masters such as Buson and Issa attempted to write serious haiku, a unique poetic genre that was short but was able to offer more than wit or humor. Because of their brevity and condensation, haiku seldom provide details. The haiku poet draws only an outline or a highly selective image, and the reader must complete the vision. Above all, a classic haiku, as opposed to a modernist one, is required to include a clear reference to one of the four seasons.

BASHŌ VS. KIKAKU

Although Twombly's inscription of Kikaku's haiku is about the peony just as is that of Bashō, there is a vast difference between Bashō's and Kikaku's haiku, which represent two kinds of haiku composition. Legend has it that Bashō had more disciples than any other poet and that Kikaku not only was his first, often praised disciple, but surpassed his master in renewing haiku composition as a work of art. While Bashō was influenced by Confucianism and Zen philosophy, Kikaku was least interested in Eastern philosophies. Not only do Bashō's haiku reflect Eastern philosophies, but they are also buttressed by the aesthetic principles derived from the philosophies. Instead of conforming to Bashō's aesthetic principles, Kikaku followed his own instincts in creating images of beauty.

The philosophy that underlies Bashō's haiku and much of classic haiku is Zen. A haiku poet like Bashō strived to create a vision in which nature and humanity are united. Such a poet sought to suppress his individuality and achieve the state of Zen. In Zen-inspired haiku, the material or the concrete is emphasized without the expression of any general principles of abstract reasoning. In classic haiku, animate and inanimate lose their differences, so that one might say haiku are not about human beings but about objects in nature. Zen teaches that the ordinary thing and the love of nature are reduced to a detached love of life as it is, without idealistic, moralistic, or ethical attachments. Things in nature are equal to human beings; both exist through and because of each other. In a Zen-inspired haiku the poet tries to annihilate one's thoughts or feelings before *satori* is attained. *Satori* is the achievement of a state of *mu*, nothingness. The state of nothingness is free of human subjectivity; it is so completely free of any thought or emotion that such a consciousness corresponds to the state of nature.

Bashō defines the state of nothingness, what is called "the realm of nothingness" in *A Travel Account of My Exposure in the Fields* [Nozarashi

Kikō], one of Bashō's earlier books of essays. He opens with this revealing passage with two haiku:²

When I set out on my journey of a thousand leagues I packed no provisions for the road. I clung to the staff of that pilgrim of old who, it is said, 'entered the realm of nothingness under the moon after midnight.' The voice of the wind sounded cold somehow as I left my tumbledown hut on the river in the eighth moon of the Year of the Rat, 1684.

<i>nozarashi wo</i>	Bones exposed in a field—
<i>kokoro ni kaze no</i>	At the thought, how the wind
<i>shimu mi ka na</i>	Bites into my flesh.

<i>aki tō tose</i>	Autumn—this makes ten years;
<i>kaette Edo wo</i>	Now I really mean Edo
<i>sasu kokyō</i>	When I speak of 'home.'

The first haiku conveys a sense of *wabi*³ because the image of his bones suggests poverty and eternity. Although Bashō fell from fatigue and hardship on his journey, he reached a higher state of mind. While he was aware of his physical and material poverty, his life was spiritually fulfilled. In this state of mind, having nothing meant having all.

The most delicate aesthetic principle of Bashō's haiku is *yugen*⁴. Originally *yugen* in Japanese art was an element of style pervasive in the language of *noh*. In reference to the *Works* by Zeami, the author of many of the extant *noh* plays, Arthur Waley expounds this difficult term *yugen*:

2 Donald Keene: *Walls within Walls: Japanese Literature of the Pre-Modern Era, 1600–1867*. New York 1976, 81.

3 *Wabi*, along with *yugen* and *sabi*, is one of the three frequently applied aesthetic principles in Japanese art. Traditionally *wabi* has been defined in sharp antithesis to a folk or plebeian saying, "*Hana yori dango*" (Rice dumplings are preferred to flowers). Some poets are inspired by the sentiment that human beings desire beauty more than food, which is lacking in animals and other nonhuman beings. *Wabi* refers to the uniquely human perception of beauty stemming from poverty. *Wabi* is often regarded as religious, as the saying "Blessed are the poor" suggests, but the spiritual aspect of *wabi* is based on the aesthetic rather than the moral sensibility.

4 For a discussion of *yugen* and other aesthetic principles in Japanese poetics, see Yoshinobu Hakutani: *Haiku and Modernist Poetics*. New York 2009, 11–16.

It is applied to the natural grace of a boy's movements, to the gentle restraint of a nobleman's speech and bearing. 'When notes fall sweetly and flutter delicately to the ear,' that is the *yūgen* of music. The symbol of *yūgen* is 'a white bird with a flower in its beak.' 'To watch the sun sink behind a flower-clad hill, to wander on and on in a huge forest with no thought of return, to stand upon the shore and gaze after a boat that goes hid by far-off islands, to ponder on the journey of wild-geese seen and lost among the clouds'—such are the gates to *yūgen*.

Waley further shows with Zeami's works that the aesthetic principle of *yugen* originated from Zen Buddhism. "It is obvious," Waley writes, "that Seami [Zeami] was deeply imbued with the teachings of Zen."⁵

The scenes Waley describes convey a feeling of satisfaction and release as does the catharsis of a Greek play, but *yugen* differs from catharsis because it has little to do with the emotional stress caused by tragedy. *Yugen* functions in art as a means by which human beings can comprehend the course of nature. Although *yugen* seems allied with a sense of resignation, it has a far different effect on the human psyche. A certain type of *noh* play like *Takasago* celebrates the order of the universe ruled by heaven, a worldview that originated from Confucianism. The mode of perception in the play may be compared to that of a pine tree with its evergreen needles, the predominant representation on the stage. The style of *yugen* can express either happiness or sorrow. Cherry blossoms, however beautiful they may be, must fade away; love between man and woman is inevitably followed by sorrow.

This mystery and inexplicability, which surrounds the order of the universe, had a strong appeal to a classic haiku poet like Bashō, whose oft-quoted "The Old Pond," mentioned earlier, is exemplary:⁶

the old pond	<i>furu ike ya</i>
a frog jumps into	<i>kawazu tobi komu</i>
the sound of the water	<i>mizu no oto</i>

This haiku shows that while the poet describes a natural phenomenon realistically, he conveys his instant perception that nature is infinitely deep and absolutely silent. Such attributes of nature are not ostensibly

5 Arthur Waley: *The Nō Plays of Japan*. New York 1957, 21–22.

6 The translation of Bashō's haiku, 'The Old Pond,' is by Hakutani.

stated; they are hidden. The tranquillity of the old pond with which the poet was struck remained in the background. He did not write “The rest is quiet”; instead he wrote the third line of the verse to read: “the sound of the water.” The concluding image was given as a contrast to the background enveloped in silence. Bashō’s mode of expression is suggestive rather than descriptive, hidden and reserved rather than overt and demonstrative. *Yugen* has all the connotations of modesty, concealment, depth, and darkness. In Zen painting, woods and bays, as well as houses and boats, are hidden; hence these objects suggest infinity and profundity. Detail and refinement, which would mean limitation and temporariness of life, destroy the sense of permanence and eternity.

By contrast, Kikaku’s aesthetic principle is diametrically opposed to *yugen*, as shown in “The Bright Harvest Moon,” one of his best-known haiku:⁷

the bright harvest moon	<i>Meigetsu ya</i>
upon the tatami mats	<i>tatami-no ue ni</i>
shadows of the pines	<i>matsu-no-kage</i>

Both images of beauty, “the bright harvest moon” and “shadows of the pines on the mats,” are descriptive rather than suggestive. They are overt and demonstrative rather than hidden and reserved as in *yugen*. Kikaku’s aesthetic principle is in sharp antithesis to *yugen*. Kikaku is said to have been criticized by Bashō, because, to Bashō, Kikaku’s imagery was ‘showy’ rather than reserved, and overt rather than mysterious.

In 1682 Bashō composed a haiku, “By Morning Glories,” (“by morning glories / I devour rice / like a man” [*asagao ni / ware wa meshi kû / otoko kana*]).⁸ Kikaku composed a haiku on a similar subject, “At a Grass Door,” (“at a grass door / I nibble on a knotgrass / like a firefly” [*kusa no to ni / ware wa tade kû / hotaru kana*]).⁹ Bashō, then, advised Kikaku, Jane Reichhold notes, “to not show off by writing this

7 Harold G. Henderson: *An Introduction to Haiku: An Anthology of Poems and Poets from Bashō to Shiki*. New York 1958, 58. The original is quoted from Henderson. The translation is by Hakutani.

8 Jane Reichhold (tr.): *Bashō. The Complete Haiku*. Tokyo 2008, 262. The original of Bashō’s “By Morning Glories” is quoted from Reichhold. The translation is by Hakutani.

9 Ibid. The original of Kikaku’s “At a Grass Door” is quoted from Reichhold. The translation is by Hakutani.

verse. Bashō uses vulgar terms for eating and avoids the polite word for cooked rice, *gohan*. Again, admiring flowers was seen as an elegant occupation, but Bashō combines the activity with the most low-class way of describing eating.¹⁰

While Bashō's haiku is focused on an image of nature rather than on that of humanity, Kikaku's haiku thrives on the interaction between an image of humanity and that of nature. In "The Bright Harvest Moon," the beauty of the moonlight is not only humanized by the light shining on the human-made objects, but it is also intensified by the shadows of the pine trees that fall on the dustless mats. The intricate pattern of the shadows of the trees intensifies the beauty of the moonlight. Kikaku's haiku depicts an interaction of nature and humanity in the creation of beauty. Comparing the two haiku poets, one might say Bashō was a poet and philosopher as Kikaku was a poet and artist.

SHIKI AND HAIKU TRADITION

The tradition of haiku established in the seventeenth century produced eminent poets like Buson and Issa in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but a revolt against this tradition took place toward the end of the nineteenth century under the banner of a young poet, Shiki. On the one hand, Bashō's followers, instead of becoming innovators as was their master, resorted to an artificiality reminiscent of the comic *renga*. On the other hand, Issa, when he died, left no disciples. The Meiji restoration (1868) called for changes in all aspects of Japanese culture and Shiki became a leader in the literary revolution. He launched an attack on the tradition by publishing his controversial essay, *Criticism of Bashō*. In response to a haiku by Hattori Ransetsu (1654–1707), Bashō's disciple, Shiki composed his own. Ransetsu's haiku had been written two centuries earlier:¹¹

yellow and white mums:
what other possible names?
none comes to my mind.

Ki-giku shira-giku
sono hoka-no na wa
naku-mogana

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Henderson 1958, op. cit., 160. The original of Ransetsu's haiku is quoted from Henderson. The translation is by Hakutani.

To Ransetsu's poem, Shiki responded with this one:¹²

yellow and white mums:	<i>Kigiku shira-giku</i>
but at least another one—	<i>hito moto wa aka mo</i>
I want a red one.	<i>Aramahoshi</i>

Shiki advised his followers that they compose haiku to please themselves. To Shiki, some of the conventional poems lack direct, spontaneous expressions: a traditional haiku poet, in his adherence to old rules of grammar and devices such as *kireji* (cutting word), resorted to artificially twisting words and phrases.

The modernist challenge that Shiki gave to the art of haiku, however, kept intact such aesthetic principles as *yugen* and *sabi*¹³. Classic poets like Bashō and Issa, who adhered to such principles, were also devout Buddhists. By contrast, Shiki, while abiding by the aesthetic principles, was regarded as an agnostic; his philosophy of life is demonstrated in this haiku by Shiki:¹⁴

the wind in autumn	<i>Aki-kaze ya</i>
as for me, there are no gods,	<i>ware-ni kami nashi</i>
there are no buddhas.	<i>hotoke nashi</i>

Although his direct references to the divinities of Japanese culture smack of a modernist style, the predominant image created by “the wind in

¹² Ibid. The original of Shiki's haiku is quoted from Henderson. The translation is by Hakutani.

¹³ Along with *yugen*, *sabi* is another frequently used term in Japanese aesthetics. This word, a noun, derives from the verb *sabiru*, to rust, implying that what is depicted is aged. Buddha's portrait hung in Zen temples exhibits Buddha as an old man in contrast to the young figure typically shown in other temples. Zen's Buddha looks emaciated, his environment barren: his body, his tattered clothes, the aged tree standing nearby, the pieces of dry wood strewn around—all indicate that they have passed the prime of their life and function. In this kind of portrait the old man with a thin body is nearer to his soul, and the old tree with its bark and leaves fallen is nearer to the very origin and essence of nature. *Sabi* is traditionally associated with loneliness. Aesthetically, however, this mode of sensibility is characteristic of grace rather than splendor; it suggests quiet beauty as opposed to robust beauty.

¹⁴ Henderson 1958, op. cit., 164. The original of Shiki's haiku, “The Wind in Autumn,” is quoted from Henderson. The translation is by Hakutani.

autumn,” a conventional *kigo*¹⁵, suggests a deep-seated sense of loneliness and coldness. Shiki’s mode of expression in this haiku is based on *sabi*.

THE FIVE PEONIES IN *UNTITLED* (2007) BY CY TWOMBLY

1. SHIKI’S HAIKU “THE WHITE PEONY”

In his painting of the peonies, Twombly inscribed on the first peony (cf. ill. 1):

the white Peony
at the Moon
one evening
crumbled
and
fell

This inscription closely represents a vertical word order of Shiki’s haiku “The White Peony” (*Shirobotan aru yo no tsuki ni kuzurekeri* [白牡丹或夜の月にくずれけり]. Twombly used the translation of the haiku by R.H. Blyth:¹⁶

The white peony;
At the moon, one evening,
It crumbled and fell.

This haiku, even though it was written by Shiki, a modernist haiku poet, expresses Confucian thought as do some of those by classical haiku poets such as Bashō, Buson, and Issa. As *The Analects*¹⁷ demonstrates the ultimate truth, the fixed, immutable principles of the universe, this haiku by Shiki, as well as those by his predecessors expresses the irreversible way of nature to which all living beings must conform. Commenting on the haiku, however, Blyth considers it a romantic verse. “The moon and the

¹⁵ *Kigo* is a seasonal reference to spring, summer, autumn, or winter in classic haiku. Modernist haiku often do not include *kigo*.

¹⁶ R.H. Blyth: *Haiku*, in 4 vol., vol. 3. Tokyo 1952, 296.

¹⁷ *The Analects* is a collection of sayings and parables written by or attributed to Confucius (552–479 BC). The collection constitutes the central texts of Confucian philosophy.

peony,” he remarks, “are not the pale disc we see in the sky, the luxurious flower of earth, but exhalations of the poetic soul. The collapse and fall of the white peony are not the inevitable decline of nature but the decadence of the spirit of man. What is common to both is the mystery of all things, though the flower is so near us, the moon so far away.”¹⁸

2. ISSA’S HAIKU “FALLING PEONY”

On the second peony Twombly inscribed:

the Peony falls
spilling out
yesterday’s
Rain
1792

For this inscription, Twombly used the translation of Issa’s haiku, “Chiru Botan [Falling Peony],” by David G. Lanoue, published at Lanoue’s website:¹⁹

1792
散ぼたん昨日の雨をこぼす哉
chiru botan / kinou no ame [zwo] / kobosu kana

the peony falls
spilling out yesterday’s
rain

¹⁸ Blyth 1952, op. cit., vol. 3, 297.

¹⁹ Lanoue, David G. (tr.): <http://haikuguy.com/issa/haiku.php?code=394.03a> [March 10, 2013]. (We would like to thank David Lanoue for his detailed information in this; email from December 13, 2012, “I ‘published’ it only on the Web as part of my online archive of 10,000 haiku by Issa (2000–present),” and December 14, “I would highly doubt that a different translator would have duplicated my translation word-for-word, so I assume that in this case the artist must have used my website. [...] In the case of the peony poem, I decided to change the word order a bit, ending the haiku with ‘rain’—even though in the original poem it ends with ‘spills’ (*kobosu*). I think this decision might be unusual enough for the translation to be ascribed to me, but [...] it’s not impossible that another translator came up with the exact same solution.”)

This translation was also published in Lanoue's book, *Issa's Best: A Translator's Selection of Master Haiku* (2012):²⁰

the peony falls
spilling out yesterday's
rain

Issa's haiku was also translated by Makoto Ueda in his book, *Dew on the Grass: The Life and Poetry of Kobayashi Issa* (2004):²¹

as it falls	<i>chiru botan</i>
the peony spills	<i>kinō no ame wo</i>
yesterday's rain	<i>koboshikeri</i>

There is some difference between the two versions of the haiku in Japanese. Whereas Lanoue translated one version (*chiru botan kinou no ame [wo] kobosu kana*), Ueda translated another (*chiru botan / kinō no ame wo / koboshikeri*). The difference lies in the third line: 'kobosu kana' (Lanoue's version) vs. 'koboshikeri' (Ueda's version). Both words *kana* and *keri* are *kireji* (cutting words) that often end a first or third, or occasionally second line in classical/traditional haiku. *Kana* denotes a phenomenon taking place continuously while *keri* describes a phenomenon that has taken place. *Kana* is reflected in Lanoue's translation of the second line ("spilling out yesterday's") while *keri* represents Ueda's second line ("the peony spills"), denoting that as the peony fell it spilt yesterday's rain, a phenomenon that took place rather than was taking place. If we assume that Twombly was not aware of the difference of *kana* and *keri*, then he must have relied on Lanoue's translation. Since Lanoue's translation was published in print in 2012, Twombly, who died in 2011, must have used the translation published on the website.

20 David Lanoue (tr.): *Issa's Best. A Translator's Selection of Master Haiku*, 133: <http://haikuguy.com/issa/search.php?keywords=the+peony+falls&year=> [March 10, 2013].

21 Makoto Ueda: *Dew on the Grass: The Life and Poetry of Kobayashi Issa*. Leiden/Boston 2004, 30.

This haiku by Issa has an affinity with Bashō's haiku on a camellia flower:²²

as it falls	<i>Ochizama ni</i>
spills the water	<i>mizu koboshi-keri</i>
a camellia flower	<i>hana-tsubaki</i>

Issa's haiku is so close to Bashō's that Issa's might be considered an imitation of Bashō's. Issa's and Bashō's haiku both depict the inevitability of whatever happens in nature, as well as the active acceptance of the inevitable. Both haiku express the irreversible way of natural phenomena to which a living being must conform: Issa's peony and Bashō's camellia flower both fall to the ground spilling the water that was on them.

3. BASHŌ'S HAIKU "PEONY AND BEE"

On the third peony Twombly inscribed the following:²³

from the heart
of the Peony
a drunken
bee

For the inscription, he used the translation of Bashō's haiku on the peony and a bee by Lucien Stryk:

From the heart
of the sweet peony,
a drunken bee.

Twombly changed "the sweet peony" to "the Peony." The following is the original of the haiku:²⁴

牡丹蕊深く分け出ずる蜂の名残り哉
botan shibe fukaku / wake izuru hachi no / nagori kana
[tree peony stamen deep / crawl out bee's / sorry to part]

²² Henderson 1958, op. cit., 31. The original is quoted from Henderson. The translation is by Hakutani.

²³ Lucien Stryk (tr.): *On Love and Barley: Haiku of Bashō*. Honolulu 1985, 79.

²⁴ Reichhold 2008, op. cit., 279.

Jane Reichhold translated the haiku:²⁵

from deep in the peony's stamens
a bee crawls out
a reluctant parting

I have translated the haiku as follows:

deep from the peony's stamen
a bee parts petals and crawls out
looks sorry to leave

Reichhold's and mine are close translations of Bashō's haiku whereas Stryk's is a highly imaginative rendition of the haiku. Bashō depicted a bee that was not drunk; the depiction of the bee in Stryk's translation is remarkably different. But the focus of the poem is the same: Stryk and Bashō both glorify the beauty of the peony. The reader of Stryk's version might wonder what had happened in the heart of the peony to make the bee drunk. Likewise, Bashō's haiku makes the reader wonder why the bee is reluctant to leave the peony.

The drunken bee in Stryk's translation is reminiscent of Emily Dickinson's short poem *I Taste a Liquor Never Brewed*:

I taste a liquor never brewed—
From Tankards scooped in Pearl—
Not all the Vats upon the Rhine
Yield such an Alcohol!

Inebriate of Air—am I—
And Debauchee of Dew—
Reeling—thro endless summer days—
From inns of Molten Blue—

When 'Landlords' turn the drunken Bee
Out of the Foxglove's door—
When Butterflies—renounce their 'drams'—
I shall but drink the more!

²⁵ Ibid., 87.

Till Seraphs swing their snowy Hats—
 And Saints—to windows run—
 To see the little Tippler
 Leaning against the—Sun—²⁶

As depicted in the penultimate stanza, Dickinson's bee is drunk in the foxglove as the bee in Stryk's translation is in the peony, but the focus of Dickinson's poem is on the bee whereas that of Stryk's translation, as well as Bashō's haiku, is on the peony. It is interesting to note that, while Bashō's bee is sober but sorry to leave the flower, Dickinson's is not only drunk but defiant of warnings and keeps drinking.

4. BUSON'S HAIKU "QUIVERING PEONY"

On the fourth peony, Twombly inscribed the following:

the Peony
 quivers
 quivers

For this inscription, Twombly used the translation of Buson's haiku on the peony and the wagon by R.H. Blyth:²⁷

地車のとどろと響く牡丹かな 蕪村
jiguruma no / todomo to hibiku / botan kana

The heavy wagon
 Rumbles by;
 The peony quivers.

Buson

"As Buson is looking at the peony," Blyth remarks, "a great cart loaded with some heavy goods rolls by. The peony trembles a little with the vibration of the ground. The place and time of this verse is vague; it is like a cut from the film of a moving picture. Contrast the following verse, also by Buson, in which the objective description is replaced by a subjective reaction:

²⁶ Thomas H. Johnson (ed.): *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Boston 1960, 98–99.

²⁷ Blyth 1952, op. cit., vol. 3, 289.

牡丹きって気のおとろへし夕かな
Botan kitte ki no otoroeshi yûbe kana

Having cut the peony,
 I felt exhausted,
 That evening.

After thinking and hesitating, and being of two minds even when he cut the flower, he felt quiet spiritless that evening, wearied to death by such a simple thing.”²⁸

Whether objective or subjective, Buson’s depiction of the peony represents a painterly eye set on the object. In contrast with the other masters such as Bashō and Issa, Buson has been considered an artist rather than a philosopher. In his time he established his career and distinguished himself as a haiku poet, as well as a painter. Most of his well-known haiku express far less philosophy than do Bashō and Issa. This is not to suggest that Bashō’s and Issa’s haiku are less painterly, as the haiku of theirs which Twombly chose display painterly descriptions of the peony. Buson’s haiku, “The heavy wagon / Rumbles by; / The peony quivers” is reminiscent of the following haiku by Bashō:²⁹

quivers quivers
 even more so with dew
 the lady flower

ひよろひよろとなほ露けしや女郎花
hyoro hyoro to / nao tsuyu keshi ya / ominaeshi
 [trembling-feeble and / still more dewy ◇ / lady flowers]

Ominaeshi (lady flower) is a perennial plant that grows a foot tall with tiny flowers blooming on a slender stalk. The plant is named “lady flower” in Japan, because it is believed to cure women’s illnesses.³⁰

²⁸ Ibid., 289–90.

²⁹ Reichhold 2008, op. cit., 308. The original is quoted from Reichhold. The translation is by Hakutani. The symbol ◇ represents ‘ya,’ a *kireji* (cutting word).

³⁰ Ibid. Reichhold notes: “The flowers, wobbling under the weight of dew, could appear as feeble as Bashō felt after a night of drinking.”

5. KIKAKU'S HAIKU "AH, THE PEONIES"

Finally, on the fifth peony Twombly inscribed:

AH! The Peonies
for which
KUSUNOKI
took off his
ARMOUR
(KIKAKU)

He quoted the translation of Kikaku's haiku on the peonies and Kusunoki by R.H. Blyth:³¹

楠の鎧ぬがれしぼたん哉 其角
Kusunoki no / yoroi nugareshi / botan kana

Ah, the peonies,
For which Kusunoki
Took off his armour! Kikaku

Kikaku's haiku is read as a tribute to the peonies. Kusunoki Masashige (1294–1336), a legendary samurai known for his valor and loyalty to the emperor, was so impressed by the peonies that he took off his armor to admire them. He fought for Emperor Go-Daigo in his attempt to take control of the sovereignty of Japan away from the Kamakura shogunate. He is celebrated as the ideal of samurai loyalty. Bashō wrote a haiku with an image of Kusunoki, "on the pinks / falls in tears / the dew of Kusunoki" (なでしこにかかる涙や楠のつゆ [*nadeshiko ni / kakaru namida ya / Kusunoki no tsuyu*]).³² Whereas the theme of Kikaku's haiku is the beauty of the peonies, that of Bashō's is the Confucian virtue of loyalty represented by the image of Kusunoki, the samurai as well as the name of a plant.³³ By contrast to Bashō's imagery, Kikaku's is overt and demonstrative rather than hidden and suggestive. Comparing these peonies with the armor, Kikaku is expressing his thought that objects in nature are far more beautiful than human-made objects.

³¹ Blyth 1952, op. cit., vol. 3, 284.

³² R.H. Blyth: *Haiku*, in 4 vol., vol. 1. Tokyo 1949, 80. The original is quoted from Blyth. The translation is by Hakutani.

³³ Ibid. Blyth notes: "This refers to Kusunoki and his son Masatsura, when they parted, in 1336, before the father's defeat and suicide."

Haiku traditionally avoided such subjects as earthquakes, floods, illnesses, alcoholism, eroticism—ugly aspects of nature and humanity. Instead, haiku poets were attracted to such objects as flowers, trees, birds, insects, sunset, the moon, and genuine love. Traditionally, the theme of love was frowned upon, but modernists in Japan and in the West have written haiku that depict physical as well as spiritual relationships of love. Twombly's spelling of the word 'armor' in the inscription as "ARMOUR" with a small letter 'r' might suggest that in his painting of the last peony he 'took off' his 'amour' and that the beauty of the peony surpassed that of his 'amour'. In Twombly's inscription on the third peony, "from the heart / of the Peony / a drunken / bee," based on Stryk's translation of Bashō's haiku on the peony and a bee, the focus of the haiku, whether the bee is drunk or sober, is the peony. Likewise, the focus of Twombly's inscription on the last peony, whether the haiku depicts an image of Kusunoki's armor or Twombly's *amour*, is the peony. All in all, Twombly's inscriptions on the painting *Untitled* (2007), though based on the four best-known haiku poets' depictions of the peony, are highly imaginative renditions of the haiku.

ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

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GEORG BRAUNGART

“INFINITE TRACE”: CY TWOMBLY’S “POETICS” BETWEEN IMAGE AND SONG

Much has been written by art historians and non-art historians about Cy Twombly, the most “old European” of American artists. Naturally, literary scholars proved to be especially fascinated by the fact that Twombly repeatedly integrated scriptural elements into his paintings. As is known, a few of his early paintings are influenced by asemantic patterns of loops that resemble script; later, starting in the 1960s, he made use of signs, letters, and words that bore meaning. The extent to which these scatterings of scriptural elements have been shaped by the “rawness” or “granularity” of the characters has been stated many times: scrawly, like the writing of a child, rendered partially illegible as a result of being revised, painted over, and written over.¹ As per Roland Barthes, people have repeatedly and trenchantly spoken of the “clumsy (*gauche*) line.”²

¹ Cf., for example, Paul Good: *Die Unbezüglichkeit der Kunst*. Munich 1998, 102 f.; Demosthenes Davvetas: Ein Abenteuer: Wenn Skriptur Sprache wird. In: Zürich 1987, 23; Hans Dickel: Cy Twomblys Konzeption von ‘Sinnlichkeit’ im Spannungsfeld zwischen New York School und *Arte povera*. Eine kunsthistorische Sicht der Berliner Bilder. In: *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen*, Vol. 45 (2003), 237–239; Jacobus 2008; Leeman 2005 (first Fr. 2004), 85–98.—My heartfelt thanks to Thierry Greub for his essential compilation of Twombly’s citations of Rilke (and others), without which I would not have been able to make the following observations, and for his encouragement along the way; I am equally grateful to my colleague Nikita Mathias for his resourceful and professional support throughout.

² Cf. Dobbe 1999, 221–240.

Through gesture, it was made clear that a process was being undertaken and that a body was active: A hand had written, a hand confronting the resistance of the form and norm of the sign; the inchoate aspect of the protocol of a hand's movement had been left behind not as a result of standardization or perfection but rather emphasized in an almost demonstrative way. When one looks at these paintings, one has no choice but to perceive the process of inscribing letters, words, and sentences and to expose that process to a reconstructive gaze. In the reception of Twombly's oeuvre, it is by and large the painterly aspects, the graphic aspects, the movement and the interpreted *process* of creation that take the center of attention; the *meaning* of those words and sentences that are decipherable is often noted only parenthetically.

Fascinated by Twombly's blurring of borders between sign and ornament, script and graphical pattern, semantics and form, forgetting and remembering—fascinated by the reading of traces³, it has at times been less noticed that Twombly is not only demonstrating and also deconstructing art but that he is often writing *about something*, too. This is especially true of works from the final 15 to 20 years of his life.

If nothing else, in this essay I would also like to attempt to (re-)construct a connection between the gestural aspects of painting and writing in Twombly's art on the one hand and the thematic aspects of what is written on the other. This should occur, for example, with the quotations from poems by Rainer Maria Rilke.

It is not unusual for the diverse references that Twombly introduces in his works with intertextual, or rather intersemiotic, connections to be treated with a certain sweeping helplessness. This is the case in the otherwise stimulating overview by Leeman: "The words in his paintings are the allusive signs of a vast, branching culture suddenly condensed on the surface of a canvas in a heap of broken images."⁴ The quotations that Twombly integrates into his works are extremely concise and

3 Cf. in particular Eva Horn: The NAKEDNESS of my Scattered Dreams. Cy Twombly's Zerkritzeln der Schrift. In: *Zeichen zwischen Klartext und Arabeske*, ed. by Susi Kotzinger / Gabriele Rippl. Amsterdam/Atlanta 1994, 362–372.—Especially thorough, and with a broad frame of reference: Annette Gilbert: *Bewegung im Stillstand. Erkundungen des Skripturalen bei Carlfriedrich Claus, Elizaveta Mnatsakanjan, Valeri Scherstanjoi und Cy Twombly*. Bielefeld 2007.

4 Richard Leeman: *Cy Twombly. A Monograph*. London 2011 (French in 2004, then English, 2005), 97.

apparently, in Rilke's case, they pursue the dispositif of a multiplied overcodification.

Before I discuss the paintings, I will first begin with a sculpture: the broken stick with the inscription comprising the final four verses of the tenth and final of Rilke's *Duino Elegies*. It exists in two versions: one in plaster from 1984 (*Untitled*, Gaeta, 1984; ill. 1) and one in bronze, painted white, from 1987 (*Untitled*, Rome, 1987; ill. 2). For both of these as well as other of Twombly's sculptures—with their tragic pathos and frequent relation to death, nevertheless possessing a somewhat playful quality—the formulation of the poet David Shapiro is appropriate: He called them "toys for broken adults."⁵ Albeit incomplete, the best commentary on this sculpture, which has several formal equivalents in Twombly's sculptural oeuvre, comes from Giorgio Agamben. Agamben proceeds from the dominant structural moment of the interrupted movement upwards and—referring back to Hölderlin's concept of the counterrhythmic caesura—ultimately sees this as a pause between rising and falling that not only distinguishes the work of the artist but also, at the same time, is an allegory for the art itself. Agamben writes:

There comes a point in the creative course of every great artist or poet, when the image of beauty which, up to that moment, he had pursued in a seemingly continuous upward movement, suddenly reverses direction and becomes visible vertically, in its fall. This moment finds its expression in Twombly's work "Untitled" in the breaking of the wood. Reversing its upwards movement, the wood falls back to earth again, back to the exact spot where the quotation from Rilke is inscribed in its scroll.⁶

The poetological or art theoretical interpretation is thus introduced. Agamben continues:

And, as in Hölderlin, the caesura reveals the word itself: in the breaking of the upward motion, the work itself appears, the art itself. What I want to say here is that the work is not merely a representation of the caesura but rather that the work itself, in its movement, constitutes a caesura—the caesura that reveals the dormant core of every

⁵ Qtd. in Jacobus 2008, in hard copy p. 8 of the document (last access: 28 Jul. 2013).

⁶ Giorgio Agamben: *Fallende Schönheit*. In: Munich 2006, 14 [English version here is partially translated from the German, partially taken from Del Roscio 2002, 283].



1 Cy Twombly: *Untitled*, Gaeta, 1984, plaster, wood, wire, cardboard, 121.5 × 36 × 56 cm, Collection Nicola Del Roscio



2 Cy Twombly: *Untitled*, 1987, bronze, oil-based white paint, 121.5 × 36 × 56 cm, cast in the Fonderia Cavallari Rome, edition of four, Private Collections

work: the place where the artistic intent sustaining it appears to be eclipsed or suspended.⁷

In sum, Agamben finds:

This is what Twombly's gesture is like in those extreme sculptures where it is as if every ascension has been inverted and broken, almost thresholds between doing and not doing: beauty that falls.

It is the point of de-creation, when the artist in his unparalleled style no longer creates but decreates—that untitled messianic moment in which art stays miraculously still, almost astounded: fallen and risen in every instant.⁸

A deconstructive sculpture: This is how one could encapsulate Agamben's consideration of Twombly (and Rilke, too), who in his formal structure embodies a hypothesis on the theory of creativity and, as a necessary corollary, on the theory of art, literature, and *poetology*. If these premises hold true, they are supported by the fact that the moment of rupture in creativity (and life, in Rilke's case) appears "suspended" in the positivity of whichever art work is at hand, be it a sculpture or painting such as Twombly's or a poem such as that of Rilke.

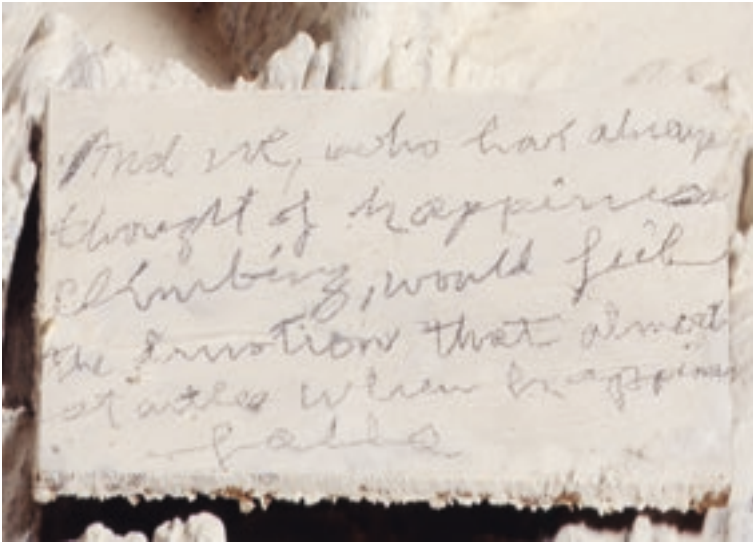
To pursue Agamben's line of thought further: A procedure, a purposeful process, a *temporal* logic is contained in Twombly's sculpture as well as in Rilke's verses from the tenth *Duino Elegy* (from 1922). It is not a fall that makes a transition into an ascent, but rather—as Agamben correctly writes—it is an ascent that is interrupted, which thereafter falls directly into the epigraph. This epigraph occupies the place of an inscription on a tombstone or a mausoleum (ill. 3):

And we, who have always
thought of happiness
climbing, would feel
the emotion that almost
startles when happiness
falls⁹

⁷ Ibid., 15.

⁸ Del Roscio 2002, 283.

⁹ This is from the translation by James Blair Leishman and Stephen Spender that was published in 1939 in various collections and editions. The line breaks are



3 Detail of ill. 1, Cy Twombly: *Untitled*, 1984, Collection Nicola Del Roscio, with Rilke quotation written in pencil on cardboard

(Und wir, die an *steigendes* Glück
denken, empfänden die Rührung,
die uns beinah bestürzt,
wenn ein Glückliches *fällt*.¹⁰)

Common to both versions (Rilke's as well as Twombly's) of this succinct—compared to the Dante-esque style of the tenth Elegy—conclusion is the strong metrical emphasis of the final word: The *fall* of *happiness* already transpires physically in the verses owing to Twombly's line break at the end, making it even more pronounced than in Rilke's original. The arrangement by which the verse becomes a commentary, an epigram about the sculpture, amplifies this. The "springtime" mentioned earlier in Rilke's elegy can hardly "suspend" this perspective: The grasp of what is local for the hanging hazel twig, or the rain falling on the "dark soil,"

Twombly's. Rilke's line breaks, used by Agamben in his argument, are different.

¹⁰ Rainer Maria Rilke: *Gedichte 1919 bis 1936*, ed. by Manfred Engel / Ulrich Fülleborn. Frankfurt a.M. 1996. (*Works. Annotated edition in four vols.*, ed. by Manfred Engel / Ulrich Fülleborn / Horst Nalewski / August Stahl, Vol. 2), 234 (Verses 110–113).



4 Cy Twombly: Detail, *Untitled Painting (Say Goodbye, Catullus, to the Shores of Asia Minor)*, Rome/Lexington, 1972–1994, oil paint, acrylic, wax crayon, oil paint (oil stick), lead pencil, colored pencil on canvas, 400 × 1585 cm, right part of central panel, Houston, The Menil Collection, Cy Twombly Gallery



5 Cy Twombly: *Quattro Stagioni*, Bassano in Teverina/Gaeta, 4 parts, Part I: *Primavera*, 1991–1995, acrylic, oil paint (paint stick), wax crayon, colored pencil, lead pencil on canvas, 312.5 × 190 cm, London, Tate

are but a final, merely symbolically despairing rebellion of life against the Egyptian-inspired journey beyond, into the sprawling underworld.

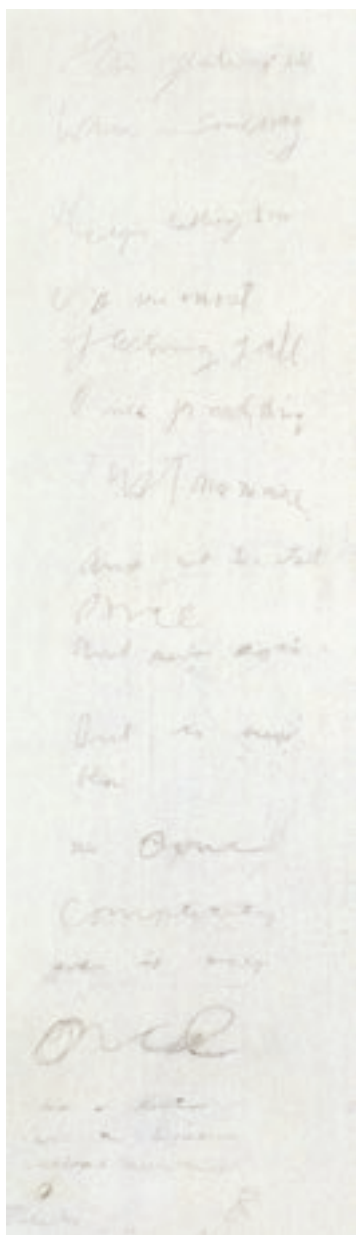
Twombly likewise integrates the conclusion of the tenth Elegy into two paintings: *Untitled Painting (Say Goodbye, Catullus, to the Shores of Asia Minor)* [Rome/Lexington, Virginia, 1972–1994] as well as the Tate’s version of *Quattro Stagioni, Primavera* (Bassano in Teverina/Gaeta, 1991–1995). In the first painting, the text’s format differs from Rilke’s; it has also been heavily painted over, so that it is barely recognizable (ill. 4).¹¹ The writing is disappearing and is almost superimposed upon by descending fields of color. In the seasonal painting (spring), Rilke’s text (always in English translation) is placed faintly on the right, next to a color structure distinguished by four layered, red daubs of paint that are in turn superimposed upon by vertical, yellow patches: The descending yellow blots out the ascending red (ill. 5).

By all appearances, the ninth Elegy is the only other one that Twombly used. In the expansive painting *Say Goodbye, Catullus*, in which the “falling happiness” of the tenth Elegy can barely be glimpsed as it disappears in the right panel, the ninth Elegy is quoted in the middle panel’s left margin¹² (ill. 6):

this floating world
Which in some way
keeps calling to us
Us the most
fleeting of all

11 On the third panel of the triptych.

12 Twombly seems to be quoting—a bit imprecisely—from the Stephen Mitchell translation, published in numerous collections. The one I have is: *Ahead of All Parting: The Selected Poetry and Prose of Rainer Maria Rilke*, ed. and translated by Stephen Mitchell. New York 1995 (using previously published translations), 383.—By the way, the final four lines (“how the dizziness / slipped away / like a fish / in the sea”) come from a hitherto overlooked poem, “Automobile” [*autokinetō*], by the modern Greek lyric poet Giorgos Seferis (1900–1971) in his 1931 volume of poems, *Turn [strophé]*. There, however, the lines Twombly cites are in Seferis’ text two (not four) verses, again (along with two other preceding verses) set apart from the rest of the poem in italics so that they appear to be quotations there, too. (I could not, however, determine their origin.)—The name *Orpheus* is spaced out between the second and third Seferis verses, written in capitals, and it appears once again slightly to the right of the last line *in the sea*, very faintly and hardly visible anymore—in other words, disappearing.



6 Cy Twombly: Detail, *Untitled (Say Goodbye, Catullus, to the Shores of Asia Minor)*, 1972–1994, oil paint, acrylic, wax crayon, oil paint (oil stick), lead pencil, colored pencil on canvas, 400 × 1585 cm, outer left section of the center panel, Houston, The Menil Collection, Cy Twombly Gallery

Once for each thing
 Just once no more
 and we too—just
 once
 and never again
 But to have
 been
 this once
 completely
 even if only
 o n c e
 high + light
 how the dizziness
 slipped away

O R P H E U S
 like a fish
 in the sea O R P H E U S

The corresponding section of Rilke's original reads as follows:

Aber weil Hiersein viel ist, und weil uns scheinbar
 alles das Hiesige braucht, dieses Schwindende, das
 seltsam uns angeht. Uns, die Schwindendsten. *Ein* Mal
 jedes, nur *ein* Mal. *Ein* Mal und nicht mehr. Und wir auch
ein Mal. Nie wieder. Aber dieses
ein Mal gewesen zu sein, wenn auch nur *ein* Mal:
irdisch gewesen zu sein, scheint nicht widerrufbar.¹³

(But because *truly* being here is so much; because everything here
 apparently needs us, this fleeting world, which in some strange way
 keeps calling to us. Us, the most fleeting of all.
Once for each thing. Just once; no more. And we too,
 just once. And never again. But to have been
 this once, completely, even if only once:
 to have been at one with the earth, seems beyond undoing.)¹⁴

¹³ Rilke: *Gedichte 1919 bis 1936*, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 227 (Verses 10–16).—The italics are Rilke's.

¹⁴ Rilke: *The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*, ed. and tr. Stephen Mitchell. New York: Vintage International, 1989, p. 199.

Rilke's final verse from this group is not used by Twombly, although it is central to Rilke's statement: The late Rilke, who grappled so intensely with the topic of death and with the (spiritual) possibilities of the invocation, or rather "concentration," of the dead, sees cause for consolation in the explicit acceptance of one's own transience.¹⁵ One might suspect that this "statement" ("to have been at one with the earth, seems beyond undoing") may have been too direct for Twombly. The artist may have found consolation enough in the positivity of the sheer existence of the image, which in the most varied yet specific painting techniques simulates disappearance and ephemerality, perhaps even celebrating them.

Ephemerality, this world and the hereafter and the border in between—or to be more precise, the crossing of the border: This is not only the central theme of Rilke's *Duino Elegies* but also of the entirety of his late work. Twombly in turn refers chiefly (if not exclusively) to Rilke's *late works*. The main mythical key for Rilke is Orpheus, whose myth (in the tenth and eleventh books of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*) is primarily interesting for a poetological interpretation (and as a result is ultimately programmatic for art): First, he demonstrates the power of song in the worlds of the living and the dead; second, he succeeds in using song to overcome death and to bring his wife Eurydice back to life (although he admittedly loses her again, and permanently, as a result of his lack of self-control); and third, Orpheus responds to this final loss with an infinite lament that survives his own death (he is torn apart by maenads) and ensures the survival of the poet in song.

On a piece of paper from 1975 (*Orpheus*, Bassano in Teverina, 1975; ill. 7)¹⁶, Twombly quotes from the thirteenth sonnet in the second part of *Sonnets to Orpheus*, which captures Rilke's particularly terse poetics of

15 The complexity of the spiritual transcendence of the border to the after-world in Rilke's oeuvre receives a comprehensive treatment in the recently published monograph by Gísli Magnússon: *Dichtung als Erfahrungsmetaphysik. Esoterische und okkultistische Modernität bei R. M. Rilke*. Würzburg 2009.—On the entire complex, cf. the author's "Spiritismus und Literatur um 1900." In: *Ästhetische und religiöse Erfahrungen der Jahrhundertwenden*, Vol. II: in 1900, ed. by Wolfgang Braungart / Gotthard Fuchs / Manfred Koch. Paderborn 1998, pp. 85–92.

16 Twombly is using the popular translation by Herter Norton: *Sonnets to Orpheus*, first published in 1942.—Concerning 'Twombly and Orpheus' compare the essay by Mary Jacobus in this volume.



7 Cy Twombly: *Orpheus*, Rome, 1975, collage: (drawing paper, staples), oil paint, wax crayon, lead pencil, 140.9 × 100 cm, Collection Cy Twombly Foundation

ephemerality, his poetics of the panegyric, of the stubborn affirmation of survival in the face of death. As if in an emblem, the sonnet's text (whose rigorous form is apparently of no interest to Twombly) functions as an annotative caption; the title is taken from the mythical singer's name inscribed as an overlay upon the text of the poem:

Be ever dead in Eurydice, mount more singingly
 mount more praisingly back into the pure relation
 [superimposed text:] O r p h e u s
 fine among the waning, be in the realm of decline,
 be a ringing glass that shivers even as it rings.

The verse in Rilke's original reads as follows:

Sei immer tot in Eurydike –, singender steige,
 preisender steige zurück in den reinen Bezug.
 Hier, unter Schwindenden, sei, im Reiche der Neige,
 sei ein klingendes Glas, das sich im Klang schon zerschlug.¹⁷

Rilke had characterized the writing of the *Duino Elegies* and, above all, the *Sonnets to Orpheus*, which took place very swiftly within a few weeks in 1922, as a rare frenzy, a storm of inspiration. In an abundance of correspondence and other utterances, he makes clear that he, as the author, was merely the recipient of a higher message and, as such, he had "accomplished" with the greatest alacrity the "rendering into poetry" of one who died before her time (the 17-year-old daughter of a friend, the dancer Vera Ouckama Knoop). This construction of authorship, tantamount to a self-effacement of the author in the service of a "higher" mission while at the same time rendering him as a privileged medium between the material world and the afterlife, is epitomized to the highest degree in the myth underlying *Sonnets to Orpheus*.¹⁸

This may invite the question as to whether Cy Twombly, in deliberately selecting a few key passages from *Sonnets to Orpheus*, was also aiming at such a concept of authorship or art. That is, was he only responding to the *motif* of transience, or was he also simultaneously addressing the

¹⁷ Rilke: *Gedichte 1919 bis 1936*, op. cit., Vol. 2, 263 (Verses 5–8).

¹⁸ Cf. Magnússon 2009, op. cit.; I am preparing a separate study on this set of themes, using my first sketch (*Spiritismus und Literatur um 1900* from 1998, op. cit.) as a point of departure.



8 Cy Twombly: *Orpheus, Bassano in Teverina, June 10, 1979*, oil paint, wax crayon, lead pencil on cardboard, 100 × 149 cm, Cologne, Collection Prof. Dr. Reiner Speck

poetics of surmounting this transience? The transformation of ephemerality and suffering into "beauty" (or "art")—as well as the survival of one's demise via transformation—constitute, after all, the basic themes of the Orpheus myth and its reception in the modern era.

In a work from 1979 on cardboard (*Orpheus*, Bassano in Teverina, 1979; ill. 8), Twombly, who couldn't speak German¹⁹, quotes a few verses of Rilke in the original—a rarity amongst the Rilke references in his oeuvre. This is probably also an homage to the recipient of the painting, "Dr. Reiner Speck." Twombly's Rilke quote in German singles out *the* central Orpheus sonnet that picks up on a mythologically inspired, poetological thought and puts it into a specifically Rilkean context: the thought of survival in song (as in Horaz), of survival in art via transformation (in Ovid and then again in Schiller and the works of many others²⁰). It is the final poem of the first part of *Sonnets to Orpheus* and thus stands in a very exposed position (and corresponds, by the way, to the opening sonnet in which Orpheus is introduced as a stirring and enchanting *singer*:

But you, godlike, beautiful—when the horde
of scorned Maenads attacked, you went on sounding,
right to the end; drowning their cries with order,
up from that mayhem rose your building song.

They couldn't break your lyre or your head,
however they tried, wrestling and raging;
and the sharp stones they threw at your heart turned
soft against you, and capable of hearing.

They tore you to pieces at last, in a frenzy,
while your sound lingered on in lions and rocks,
and in trees and birds. You still sing there.

19 Personal communication with Reiner Speck during the symposium in Cologne.

20 In Schiller's *Nänie*: "*Auch ein Klaglied zu sein im Mund der Geliebten ist herrlich, / Denn das Gemeine geht klaglos zum Orkus hinab* (But an elegy from the lips of loved ones is magnificent / For the dregs descend to Orcus without a sound)"; or, more radically, at the end of the second version of *Götter Griechenlandes* (*Gods of Greece*): "*Was unsterblich im Gesang soll leben, / Muß im Leben untergehn*. (What should live immortal in song / Must die out in life.)"—Variations on this idea can be found, for example, in Plato, Heine, Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, down to the present day.

Oh you lost god! You everlasting trace! Only
because that hatred ripped and scattered you
are we listeners now, and one mouth of Nature.²¹

(Du aber, Göttlicher, du, bis zuletzt noch Ertöner,
da ihn der Schwarm der verschmähten Mänaden befiel,
hast ihr Geschrei übertönt mit Ordnung, du Schöner,
aus den Zerstörenden stieg dein erbauendes Spiel.

Keine war da, daß sie Haupt dir und Leier zerstör,
wie sie auch rangen und rasten; und alle die scharfen
Steine, die sie nach deinem Herzen warfen,
wurden zu Sanftem an dir und begabt mit Gehör.

Schließlich zerschlugen sie dich, von der Rache gehetzt,
während dein Klang noch in Löwen und Felsen verweilte
und in den Bäumen und Vögeln. Dort singst du noch jetzt.

O du verlorener Gott! Du unendliche Spur!
Nur weil dich reißend zuletzt die Feindschaft verteilte,
sind wir die Hörenden jetzt und ein Mund der Natur.)²²

Twombly precisely reproduces the final three lines (the second tercet, in other words, preserving the line breaks of the original)—with one exception: When he writes the German “reißend” (literally “ripping,” or “ripped” in the translation above), he spells it with “ss” instead of the “ß.”²³

What did it mean for Twombly to write in German, a language he hadn’t mastered? Does that turn the script into even more of a graphical structural moment within the painting?—One sees the name “Orpheus” tilting across the painting twice: once, more or less in pure Greek, and then as a hybrid (the Greek *phi* is also included in the Latin version), and in such a way as to isolate each individual letter so that the name of the mythical singer loses itself in the fragments of its own elements. The trace of which the Rilke quotation then speaks is then visible: penciled letters that nearly disappear in an almost natural, impurely white background.

²¹ *Sonnets to Orpheus*, trans. David Young. Middletown, CT, 1987, 53.

²² Rilke: *Gedichte 1919 bis 1936*, op. cit., Vol. 2, 253.

²³ This reveals that Twombly used a bilingual edition as a reference that lead him to this spot.

These three verses suggest the myth from the ending: The Thracian singer becomes divine through death, a "god," as Rilke writes, who can still work his magic in the midst of his downfall—death as metamorphosis and thus transition into the infinite. The infinite trace is a trace that loses itself in the infinite. In Derrida's sense, the trace (especially the infinite one) represents an absence, a deferred reference. Individual features dissolve, and on all sides: The singer himself becomes an infinite trace; his listeners disappear behind their ears and for their part become a universal organ articulating a very general "Nature."

The concept of the "trace," one need hardly emphasize, is prominent not only in post- or neostructuralist theories of semiotics but also in the research on Twombly. It felicitously identifies the paradoxical interpenetration of presence and absence, of appearance and disappearance, that is so characteristic of the palimpsest-like structures in Twombly's pictures. The complexity of all this is amplified even further through the intersemiotic relation that is introduced by the literary language and the words in the pictures.²⁴

The word encodes or "infects"²⁵ the work of visual art, the painting by Twombly, in its entirety. Into the space of *implicit* articulation—which is what the painted image and the drawing primarily are (especially in the art historical context of the twentieth century)—it introduces a moment of *explicitness* that immediately opens a dynamic between the attribution of meaning and structural resistance. As a result, one can say (and this is my central thesis) that the pictures born of demonstrative understatement (and thus approaching self-negation), which can hardly be understood as becoming structures in the sense of attaining a condition of permanence—these graphic-imagistic articulations, precisely by virtue of this quality, can be interpreted as a self-withdrawal from the horizon of meaning opened by, or even imposed by, the words. The ephemera inscribed in the picture via painting and drawing techniques become an allegory for the trace, an allegory of the self-withdrawal of meaning, as a result of the dialogue with the Word (or, to be more exact, as a result of the tension with the Word that arises formally as well as in the mode of

24 This is an appropriate point to note the recent discussions about the pictoriality of script; cf., for example: *Schriftbildlichkeit. Wahrnehmbarkeit, Materialität und Operativität von Notationen*, ed. by Sybille Krämer / Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum / Rainer Totzke. Berlin 2012.

25 This is a formulation made by Richard Hoppe-Sailer in a discussion during the symposium.

intended reception—meditation *and* reflection). The word, as a part of the structural dynamics of the picture, at first appears to have the function of a “label” that designates the “remainder” of the picture (whose subject is that which one sees or believes to see) in the context of a long-accepted (extending into the eighteenth century) and naïve semiotics. And that is precisely what the painterly, graphic components of the image are withdrawing from. The hegemony of the explicitly denotative word is circumvented by the self-withdrawal of the painterly and graphic aspects of the picture (which of course include, in particular, the constant blurrings as well as instances in which shapes are painted over or crossed out).

Seen in this light, these paintings by Twombly constitute a very incisive contribution to the Laocoön debate and to the question of the territorial conflict between poetry and painting.²⁶ In Twombly’s paintings (at least, in those that I’ve drawn into the present discussion), poetry and painting enter into a fragile synthesis that is distinguished on the one hand by the negation of its structuredness (in terms of pictorial art) and on the other by the circumvention of the assignation of meaning (of the Word). In this sense, the poetry *in the pictures* (and, with modifications, also in the sculptures), with verbal language, invokes another semiotic system, simultaneously transcending the sheer presence of the visual object and producing (here, again, precisely in the sense offered by Lessing at the end of his Laocoön text)²⁷ relations that reach deep down into the memory of the Occident, going back to Greek mythology. Here, transcendence, precisely in the very formal sense of overstepping bounds, becomes recognizable as a motif of a picture just like an instance of aesthetic structure that takes as its cipher the singer Orpheus. His “infinite trace” is the song that survives its creator and thus overcomes death.

To put it differently: As a result of the weighty words inscribed by Twombly into his pictures and which repeatedly become a gesture of disappearance (at the very least, then, when they are wrenched into the maelstrom of self-negation by being blurred or painted over), he introduces—seen from Lessing’s perspective—a third space within the

26 Still essential reading that deals with this web of problems: David E. Wellbery: *Lessing’s ‘Laocoon’*. *Semiotics and Aesthetics in the Age of Reason*. Cambridge/London etc. 1984.

27 In the sixth chapter of his *Laocoön* (1766), Lessing speaks of “the broader sphere of poetry” that extends beyond “the narrow confines of space or time.” Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: *Laokoon oder Über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie*. Critical edition, ed. by Friedrich Vollhardt. Stuttgart 2012 (RUB 18865), 56.



9 Cy Twombly: *Analysis of the Rose as Sentimental Despair*, Bassano in Teverina, 1985, 5 parts, Part IV, oil-based house paint, oil paint, wax crayon on canvas mounted on wooden panel, 245.4 × 257.2 cm, Houston, The Menil Collection, Cy Twombly Gallery

picture: the space of history and myth. The danger here, however, is that, as a result, an evasion beyond the word/image relation takes place; and then, the gesture of denial on the part of the painterly/graphic aspect is bypassed, as it were, by the reception that permits the word to lead *directly* to the myth. The explicit attribution of meaning that, via the Word, is more capable of being suggested than achieved, could become a surrogate for the confrontation with the picture's structure. A reduction of meaning in the sense of mere "name dropping" would be the result.

In closing, I would like to introduce a third, very concise, prominent, and existential Rilke quotation used by Twombly: the poet's own epitaph. It reads:

Rose, oh reiner Widerspruch, Lust
Niemandes Schlaf zu sein unter soviel
Lidern.²⁸

(Rose, oh, pure contradiction, desire
To be no one's sleep under so many
Eyelids.²⁹)

In *Analysis of the Rose as Sentimental Despair*, Bassano in Teverina, 1985 (Part IV)³⁰, Rilke's epitaph, barely decipherable, is presented as such (ill. 9):

Rose O Sheer
contradiction
sleep under so many Lids.

In 2008, in the gigantic Munich *Roses* cycle (which also contains references to other poets, such as Ingeborg Bachmann), Twombly writes Rilke's epitaph in a manner that is not only much clearer but also entirely different: as a negative in a red field, that is to say, in a rose. There, in contrast to the textual version from 1985 (ill. 10; cf. p. 363, ill. 7), it reads:

²⁸ Rilke: *Gedichte 1919 bis 1936*, op. cit., Vol. 2, 394.

²⁹ Literal translation by the translator Daniel Mufson.

³⁰ Cf. HB IV 48: *Venere Sopra Gaeta*, 1988, painted over, with the whole quotation, as well as HB IV 49, barely legible.

Rose,
O pure
 Contradiction,
the desire
to be no ones
Sleep
under so many
Petals.

The fifth sonnet in the first part of Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus* shows that the motif of roses is directly tied to Orpheus:

Don't lay a stone to his memory. The rose
can bloom, if you like, once a year for his sake.
For Orpheus is the rose. His metamorphosis
takes this form, that form. No need to think

about his other names. Once and for all:
when there's singing, it's Orpheus. He comes and goes.
It's enough if sometimes he stays several
days; more, say, than a bowl of roses.³¹

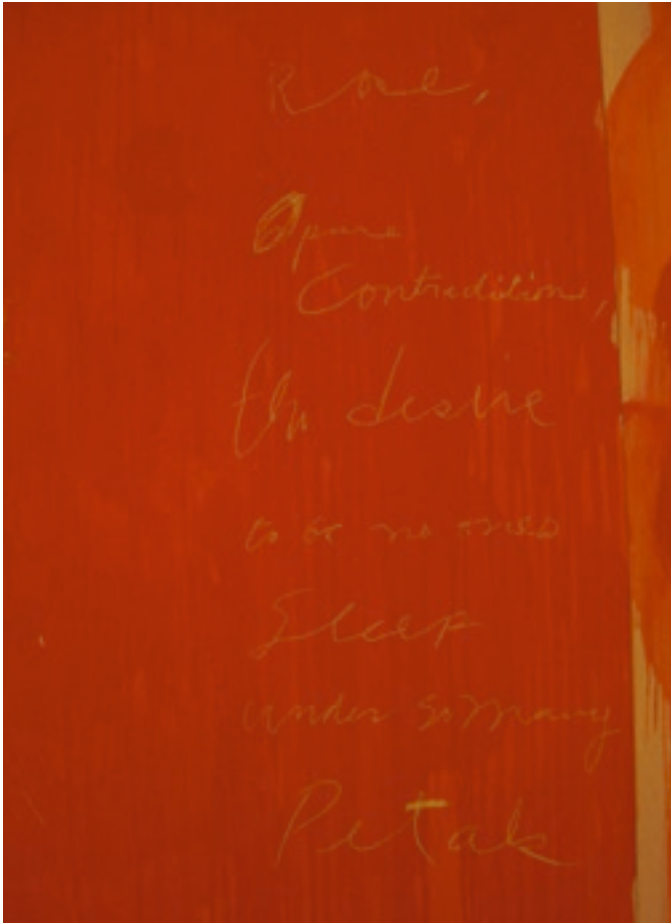
(Errichtet keinen Denkstein. Laßt die Rose
nur jedes Jahr zu seinen Gunsten blühn.
Denn Orpheus ist. Seine Metamorphose
in dem und dem. Wir sollen uns nicht mühen

um andre Namen. Ein für alle Male
ist Orpheus, wenn es singt. Er kommt und geht.
Ist nicht schon viel, wenn er die Rosenschale
um ein paar Tage manchmal übersteht?³²)

The sonnet from 1922 corresponds strikingly to the epitaph composed by Rilke shortly before his death. The *rose* is the protest against death, or, to be more precise: against the death of the singer.

31 Rilke: *Sonnets to Orpheus*, tr. David Young. Wesleyan University Press, 11.

32 Rilke: *Gedichte 1919 bis 1936*, op. cit., Vol. 2, 243 (Verse 1–8).



10 Detail of Cy Twombly: *Untitled (Roses)*, 2008, cf. p. 363, ill. 7, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich, Udo and Anette Brandhorst Foundation, Museum Brandhorst

In Twombly's rose painting, the writing, the quotation of the poem, is entirely different from early works: It is extremely withdrawn; it cannot have the function of imprinting its own stamp upon the image. The few verses come across as a delicate, light inscription upon a monumental rose petal in what is for Twombly an almost untypically vast cycle³³; they

33 Compare the essay by Armin Zweite in this volume.

are the legacy of a poet who preserves himself as a singer of transience precisely by praising this transience beyond the threshold of death, almost like a clever capitulation of the word to the mighty image. As with Orpheus himself, who in song survived his destruction, in Rilke's case, the singer's desire aims solely at the complete annihilation of the self. The withdrawal of the meaning even of poetry's self-withdrawal is radicalized (and, as an inscription on an actual tombstone, certainly constitutes a relapse again); it no longer wishes to occupy the dreams of men but rather wants to be nowhere, and thus everywhere. "Who speaks of victors? Survival is everything."³⁴ So goes the famous last verse of Rilke's *Requiem* for Wolf Graf von Kalckreuth, written in 1908. Surviving by withdrawing—once "having been"—is the paradoxically ephemeral form of survival in Rilke's late works. Might one also be able to say this about Twombly's *latest* work, which once again showed a much stronger tendency to the monumental?

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34 Rilke: *Gedichte 1919 bis 1936*, op. cit., Vol. 1, 426 (Verse 156).



1 “Inspiration Collage” by Cy Twombly (cf. ill. 9 on the outer left edge),
photo: Udo Brandhorst, April 2008

ARMIN ZWEITE

TWOMBLY'S ROSES. ON A FEW OF THE PAINTER'S PICTURES IN THE MUSEUM BRANDHORST

Cy Twombly was 83 when he died unexpectedly on July 5, 2011.¹ Although tremendously productive through the end of his life, his death seemed to signify the end of an artistic era. With his multifaceted oeuvre he undeniably figures among the most important painters of the 20th century and indeed the early 21st century. Twombly's work enriched American art and in some ways has had a lasting impact: it seems not only justified and self-evident but also fair and necessary to mention him in the same breath with his contemporaries, Andy Warhol (1928–1987), Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008) and Jasper Johns (b. 1930). However, his body of work can be ascribed neither to Abstract Expressionism nor Pop Art, and connections to Minimalism or Conceptual Art are so obscure that one can hardly link his paintings and drawings to the defining movements of the '60s and '70s. A few rather vague and isolated thematic intersections can be drawn to Anselm Kiefer's works, although replete with obscurities, his expansive cosmic imagery, Richard Wagner-esque pathos and graphic style are the opposite of Twombly. A tour d'horizon of the last 30 or 40 years evinces the painter's singular status, attesting to the varied history of his oeuvre's reception as well. Only in the last 10 to 15 years of his life was Twombly among those prominent creative figures accorded utmost public recognition worldwide. This extraordinary fame did not affect his own reticence and humility.

1 This essay is a slightly extended version of a lecture given at a commemoration of the painter on April 25, 2012, his 84th birthday, in the Rosensaal of the Museum Brandhorst in Munich.

As many other artists of his generation, Twombly was initially shaped by the Abstract Expressionism of the early '50s, yet he developed different visual strategies early on, which in hindsight cannot be linked to Pollock, Motherwell or Rothko. The intellectual climate at Black Mountain College in particular motivated him to operate with chance, as it did other students as well. Repetitive shape configurations, graffiti-like elements, scribbles and smearing² were as equally subject to this principle as scattered particles, undefinable upon closer inspection, or clumsy marks forming vaguely delineated fields on otherwise empty surfaces. "There came a man," wrote Charles Olson (1910–1970) in late January 1952 in a yet unpublished text, "who dealt with whiteness. And with space. He was an American. And perhaps his genius lay most in innocence rather than in the candor now necessary. In any case, he was not understood."³

The poet accurately describes a few moments that shall remain decisive in Twombly's work: the whiteness, the emptiness, the unself-consciousness. But Olson also refers to the lack of understanding the painter's works provoked from the very beginning and long thereafter. An oeuvre characterized by reticence and thrift must have seemed almost forcibly unwieldy and incommensurable in the period of Abstract Expressionism. Early attempts at characterizing and conceptualizing Twombly's paintings, drawings and objects are for the most part inadequate, which in the face of the emphatically non-artistic, consciously dilettante nature of the pictures is hardly surprising. Drawing was actually scrawling and scribbling; painting: spilling and botching. Writing apparently occurred with the left hand or with blindfolded or closed eyes. Instead of concise forms and identifiable motifs, the artist obviously aimed to demonstrate methods that emphasize the incipient stages of the creative process, but these are embodied in negative, or more specifically, destructive moments. What the viewer perceived in the images were processes of erasure, covering, effacing and overwriting. Vague form particles and amorphous traces of color are superimposed on one another here and there as if further layers are on their way. At least this much is certain: purposeful ideas and preconceptions did not determine the artistic method; rather it developed spontaneously in the working process itself.

Even if Twombly did not follow any central concept—the configurations of graphic and coloristic elements seemingly arising from impetuous

2 Cf. the two essays by Roland Barthes in: Barthes 1991, 157–194.

3 Del Roscio 2002, 9.

reactions and random inspiration—he did not operate indiscriminately or entirely erratically (ill. 1). In retrospect, we can safely say that these were open constellations of color and form in which, albeit generally few and far between, insinuations of coherence, direction and ultimately signification and meaning appear. Following Gottfried Boehm one can paraphrase the formal principle in the early days and pertinent long thereafter as a “process of palimpsest-like stratification,” or as the “contamination of display and concealment.”⁴

Twombly's “remembering vision,” with which he further developed the aesthetic agenda of the surrealists' psychic automatism, does not address the chaotic, the subconscious, the repressed, the fantastical or the private, yet in the course of its development increasingly addresses “the great contents, norms, figures and topoi of European/Mediterranean culture.”⁵ However, it is less of a representational allusion than names we encounter: Orpheus, Apollo, Olympia, Pan, Virgil, Hyperion, Arcadia, School of Athens, Empire of Flora and many more. Twombly's seemingly clumsy handwriting, the barely decipherable words or jotted down half sentences have an evocative character, yet almost never allow for an immediate bridge from artistic symbol to written meaning. The links between the signifier and the signified often remain so fragile that there are hardly any analogies between the aesthetic appearance of the painting and that which is more or less clearly stated or thematically insinuated on the canvas or paper.

This programmatic approach is traceable in the artist's oeuvre through the '70s to varying degrees. From the late '40s through the early '70s he created approximately 500 paintings, serving mainly as a springboard for describing his artistic method. After 1972 Twombly painted very little at first, returning to the medium with more intensity toward the end of the decade. In this phase, for instance, the two essential texts by Roland Barthes⁶ appear that contributed much to Twombly's artistic method and aesthetic strategies. Compiled by Heiner Bastian, the *Catalogue Raisonné of the Paintings* records only 65 pictures, some of them in several parts, for the 23 years after 1972. As of 1995, however, his production increased greatly. From 1996 to 2007 he created 85 paintings, some very large, including multipart series. Stylistically, a profound change was in the

4 Ibid., 185.

5 Ibid., 186 and 187 (both quotes).

6 *Non multa sed multum*, Milan 1979 (Multhipla edizioni); *Wisdom of Art*, New York 1979 (Whitney Museum of American Art), cf. n. 2.

making at the end of the '70s and resolute by the mid-'80s, when the dialectic between evidence and enigma lost meaning and formal clarity and substantive rigor gained increasing heft.⁷

More and more, compact dominant subjects took the place of volatile structures. Of course, such concentration on clear individual forms has a longer history and can be traced in the artist's oeuvre intermittently back into the early '60s.⁸ This tendency manifested anew, now thematized, at the end of the '70s, early '80s,⁹ possibly reinforced by the sculptural work the artist more regularly applied himself to during this phase. In this mode as well a longer abstinence is notable. At the end of the '50s he had basically stopped making objects. Only one and a half decades later, that is, in the mid-'70s, did he create his first pipe sculptures before getting to triangular and circular formations, alongside found objects from the manual agriculture in the subsequent period. As his experiments with traditional beliefs begin, Twombly continuously reverts to botanical elements such as flowers and leaves, including allusions to ancient monuments and gravestones. Such static subjects oppose others that refer to mobility, such as cars and ships.¹⁰

An emphasis on the unity and presence of the work, the hierarchical division of parts, the clear arrangement of the subject and a more or less

7 HB I–V, 1992–2009.

8 *Death of Pompey* was created in 1962 (HB II 128) and shows two relatively closed circular shapes of different sizes above a swaying grid structure. Similar compositions include: *Catullus* (HB II 130), *Untitled*, 1964 (HB II 172) and *Discourse on Commodus* (HB II 156; cf. p. 230, ill. 1.1–9). In the first painting of the series both of the white oval shapes are integrated into the grid, partially effacing it, while further along in the altogether nine parts, small slivers are superimposed on and destroy these shapes which start to disintegrate themselves.

9 Cf. *Shield of Achilles*, 1978 (HB IV 13/1; cf. p. 154, ill. 5); *Bacchus*, 1981 (HB IV 21).

10 From 1978 onwards there are a number of examples of triangular, angular and wedge shapes: NDR S I 31/32, 37/38, 39/40, 46/47, 49, 66 and more; circle and lid shapes are found in nos. 80/81, 84/85, 87/88, 91, 95/96, 114 and more; vegetal elements are found in nos. 15, 21, 29/30, 35/36, 55, 58, 67, 69, 70, 83, 97, 107, 111/112, 116, 126, 127, 128, 131, 139, 147; monuments and tombs are indicated in these works: nos. 53, 74, 89, 125, 135 as well as in various later sculptures. Cf. Munich 2006, nos. 8, 9, 10, 14, 22, 30; cars in: NDR S I 29/30, 33/34, 41, 43, 44, 127/128; ships in 74, 75/76, 78/79, 95/96.

emphatic alignment characterize *Winter Passage: Luxor*¹¹ as well as statues such as *Rotalla* (1990) and *Thermopylae* (1991).¹²

Possibly induced by the isolation of the free-standing statues, a shift in Twombly's paintings ensues, revealing a distinct move toward compositional simplicity and clarity.

The more dominant position of the subject and the painter's experiments with separate, hierarchized or historicized pictorial forms¹³ point toward what is to come and embody the makings of double shift: first, the tendency toward closed complexes of shapes, and second, the use of vibrant coloring. Both are characteristic for the cycles that emerged in 2000 (pp. 114–115, ills. 1.1–1.10).¹⁴

Ships are the primary motif in many works from this phase. Rowboats moving from one side of the image to the other appear as vehicles of transition, often conceived as allusions to the final journey from life to death. The seasons pictures¹⁵ (cf. p. 298, ill. 4; p. 331, ill. 5) are “paradigms of a metaphor of being” (Hans Blumenberg) and the *Lepanto* cycle, defined by maneuvering boats and the central naval battle, represent death and undoing and allude to the transience of power (cf. pp. 262–263, ills. 4.1–4.3).

In this vein, Twombly's renewed interest in natural motifs is noteworthy. His stay in the Seychelles in early 1990 led to a series of immensely suggestive leaf and flower depictions, surely a direct reaction to the lush vegetation. This visual language continues in the works created shortly thereafter in Gaeta.¹⁶

11 Cf. Christian Klemm: Cy Twombly im Kunsthhaus Zürich. In: *Jahresbericht 1994*, Zürcher Kunstgesellschaft, 102 ff.

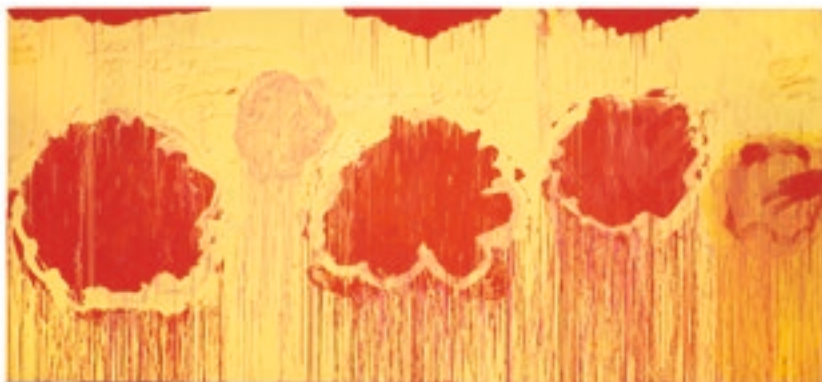
12 NDR S I 88 and 111.

13 The works entitled *Bacchus* (HB IV 21), the 5-part work *Analysis of the Rose as Sentimental Despair* (ibid., 27) and others (HB IV 41–44) each consist of a large piece and a much smaller piece that is installed separately. Distinguishing between main and auxiliary pieces signifies hierarchy. The historical reference may be motivated by an attempt to reactivate an outward form of pathos.

14 Cf. HB V 8: *Coronation of Sesostris* (I–X), HB V 11: *Lepanto* (I–XII), HB V 34–41: *Untitled (Bacchus Psilax Mainomenos)* among others.

15 HB IV 63 and 64.; cf. Greub 2013a.

16 Cf. Cy Twombly: *Souvenirs of d'Arros and Gaeta* (Gal.-Kat. Thomas Ammann 1990), Zurich 1992.



2.1 Cy Twombly: *Untitled*, Gaeta, 2007, acrylic, wax crayon, colored pencil on wood, 252 × 552 cm, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich, Udo and Anette Brandhorst, Museum Brandhorst Foundation



2.2 Detail of ill. 2.1, Cy Twombly: *Untitled*, 2007, Museum Brandhorst, with a quote from Taigi

I

Alongside the leitmotif of boats another one merges, especially in his later work—roses. A natural phenomenon, the rose blossom joins forces with the produced, culturally coded and functional object of the boat. Twombly is, as he has repeatedly emphasized, fascinated by landscape, but he is also interested in its vegetation.¹⁷ As a dominant motif the rose first appears in 1985 in a five-piece work entitled *Analysis of the Rose as Sentimental Despair*, currently housed in the Cy Twombly Gallery in Houston. Here, along with verse by Rumi and Leopardi, he cites Rilke's epitaph for the first time (cf. p. 343, ill. 9). *Petals of Fire* follows in 1988, but here it is uncertain if roses are intended (cf. p. 410, ill. 4).¹⁸

That changed when in the summer of 2007 Collection Lambert exhibited *Blooming. A Scattering of Blossoms and Other Things* at the Hôtel de Caumont in Avignon.¹⁹ The show included six grandiose images of peonies—252 × 552 cm each—and four somewhat smaller in size, not directly related to the subject, as well as other pictures featuring a comparable thematic repertoire.²⁰

One of these large, highly suggestive and vibrant paintings is housed in the Udo and Anette Brandhorst Foundation in Munich.²¹ Let's take a moment with it here (ill. 2.1). On a radiant light yellow background four red blossom shapes can be discerned, the briskly brushed paint running in thin drips, the yellow encroaching onto the red, and the red overtaking the yellow, concealing it like a veil. The rhythmic effect is striking: the center of the composition is the middle of the second blossom from the left. To it corresponds a similarly sized blossom on the left border, while in the middle of the right half of the picture a somewhat smaller blossom hovers slightly higher up. Accompanying it on the right border is an implied, markedly smaller shape. Vibrant yellow dominates the

17 Both of his lithograph series, *Natural History, Part I and II* from 1974 and 1975/76 accommodate this in the images of mushrooms and trees, more specifically, their leaves.

18 HB IV 51–54.

19 Avignon 2007, ill. p. 102 f.

20 HB V 49–58.

21 Ibid., 58. The colors here are deceiving because several barely visible elements of the composition appear much clearer than in reality.

upper third of the entire picture, left of center between the first and second blossoms extending virtually uninterrupted from the top edge to the bottom edge. At second glance, however, one discerns a smaller rose between the two large blossoms that was there before and covered over during the painting process. The original design and vertical drips of red paint linger in the smudged orange. The three partial shapes on the top edge are the remnants of vanished blossoms. These flat curves lend the composition a transitory effect, as if the roses are gliding upwards, potentially vanishing from the visual field. The floating subjects suggest that Twombly saw this picture as a potential part of a larger context. The contrast between heavy massive elements, their uneven weight and the latent rising movement toward the right, as well as the delicate vertical lines from the fast flowing paint characterize this vivid painting no less than its reduced, unvaried dichromatic coloring. Overall, what is exceptional is how the painter balances a repeatedly disturbed equilibrium without prioritizing the decorative.

In the upper left half the artist wrote the following comparatively legible text with a red colored pencil (ill. 2.2):

The pistil / of the Peony / Gushes (or Gushed) / out / into the noon-
day / Sunlight

Largely concealed by yellow paint, detectable between these lines is a smaller verse in dark letters:

From the heart / of the Peony / a drunken / bee

That these lines are based on a haiku by Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694) was identified very quickly,²² but Thierry Greub was the first to identify Twombly's consulted sources.²³ According to him the legible verse in red is based on a haiku by Tan Taigi (1709–1771). Here is the English translation:

22 Cf. Heiner Bastian e.g. in: HB V, 29.—Compare Yoshinobu Hakutani's contribution in this volume to the haikus as well.

23 The following is based on a written message from December 13, 2012 which Thierry Greub made accessible to the author by e-mail. Sincere thanks to Thierry Greub.

The stamens and pistil
Of the peony gush out
into the sunlight.²⁴

The painter does not give the full citation; he shortens the first line by leaving out the stamens, which may have prompted Robert Pincus-Witten to interpret “pistil” as phallic.²⁵

The barely legible verse in dark letters is from Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694). It goes:

From the heart
Of the sweet peony
A drunken bee.²⁶

Here, too, the artist changes the original by using only a part of the haiku and leaving out the word “sweet” in the second line.²⁷

The poetry and screen paintings of the Tokugawa period as well as his fondness for feathery flowers in certain works from this period could have inspired Twombly. Japanism as the source of the extremely wide dimensions of the peony pictures does not seem entirely unreasonable. As to whether or not Twombly referred to the French classicism of the revolutionary period, however, as embodied in the architecture of the Avignon exhibition space, is anyone's guess.²⁸

24 Quoted from R.H. Blithe: *Haiku, in Four Volumes*, Vol. 3: Summer-Autumn, 7th edition. Tokyo 1963, 286.

25 Cf. Robert Pincus-Witten 2007, n.p.

26 Quoted from Lucien Stryk: *On Love and Barley—Haiku of Bashō* (Penguin Classics). Harmondsworth 1985, 79, no. 246.

27 Twombly cites the whole haiku in another painting in the series, entirely in green and white (cf. New York 2007, no. IV, cf. p. 306, ill. 1). The haikus inscribed there read: “The white peony at the moon one evening crumbled and fell / The peony falls spilling out yesterdays rain / From the heart of the peony a drunken bee / The peony quivers.” Cf. Jane Reichhold (ed.): *Bashō: The Complete Haiku*. Tokyo 2008. Quoted from Heiner Bastian here in: HB V, 49 (where “peonies,” however are mentioned).

28 Pincus-Witten 2007, n.p. See also Heiner Bastian in: *Einführung. Die Macht der Bilder und der Poesie*. In: HB V, 27. Though the following remark the painter made to Nicholas Serota could support this view: “... that idea (of architecture) stimulated me to do a show, a whole show, because I like the Palladian form. This house is ideal, because you have windows on one side and you have a

The aesthetic presence of the pictures, in Avignon or New York alike, was at first glance tremendously moving and had a lasting effect, initially via the colors' impact and subsequently via the structure and interplay of the compact delicate shapes. Resistant to a quick read, the inscribed verse ultimately elevates visual sensation to the poetic realm. James Rondeau described this aesthetic experience, augmented in 2007 in New York when all of the pictures in this series were viewable in one large space, as such: With the peony pictures the painter evokes "the feeling of an approaching departure that does not let us go. He entrances us in the here and now—in a flood of bodies and colors."²⁹ This is correct, but it does not stop there, for in these works Twombly scales back his evocative impulse. That reveals itself only at second glance. The difference between the overwhelming congruence of red and yellow, the large subjects' powerful rhythm, the energetic brushstrokes, the initially halting flow and the paint's subsequent downward streaming on one hand and the barely decipherable writing on the other hand, allows for a transcendence of the images' immediacy. The contradiction between ostentation and subtlety, emotive presence and shaky inscription invites reflection, encouraging one to pause, behold and meditate. A negotiation of the decorative effect and blatantly bold intensity ensues, if nothing else via the literary reference, prompting a concentration on potentially content-related features.

Surveying the six large peony paintings, two compositions stand out from the other four: not only is the amount of flowers less, but there is also a latent seriality. This is also the case with the painting in the Brandhorst Foundation (cf. ill. 2.1). Here the roses' size are subject to limitation, as three flowers of similar diameter join a singular smaller shape. Further, the roses' inner shapes in the Brandhorst Foundation painting are closed; whereas in other versions a linear structure is more prominent and the flow of the brushstrokes more apparent. A similar phenomenon can be observed in another picture in the series. It figures as Nr. IV in the series in the corresponding publication, featuring white roses on a light green background (cf. p. 306, ill. 1).³⁰ Here the flowers form a line, initially ascending and then slightly descending, with the size initially

straight line of doors on the other, and then you have this beautiful shape. I would have liked to be an architect ...” (London 2008, 48). Twombly does not explicitly name the Hôtel de Caumont, although it seems reasonable that he thought about the building during the interview.

²⁹ Cf. Chicago 2009, 31.

³⁰ Cf. New York 2007.

increasing, then decreasing. In both works, the picture in the Brandhorst Foundation and the picture listed as Nr. IV in relevant publications, a specific tendency is discernible. Ornamental elements in the other four versions of the peony pictures that definitely play a role, albeit a minor one, are largely effaced. From these more rigid compositions Twombly was able to arrive at the rose pictures he created in early 2008. This path toward repetition on the one hand and reduction on the other seems of utmost consequence in retrospect. His decision to scale up considerably has a very specific reason.

II

At the end of January 2008, Twombly requested the dimensions of a specific room in the Museum Brandhorst building. For the *Lepanto Cycle*, the architects Mattias Sauerbruch / Louisa Hutton designed and built a shell structure for a trapezoidal hall in the front building of the museum. Individual wall segments butting against one another at obtuse angles formed an ellipse divided lengthwise. This construction facilitated a panorama of the 12-piece cycle, an installation that allowed visitors to take in all of the pictures at once upon entering the hall—a spectacular overall impression that surpassed all previous installations of this major work of Twombly's, in Venice, Munich, Bregenz and Madrid by far.

As the artist could gather from the floor plan, from this room on the second floor potential visitors would make their way through two smaller rooms to a large square room originally intended for Andy Warhol's massive works from the late '70s and '80s, according to plans made by the Bavarian State Painting Collection. *Oxydation Painting* from 1978 (298.5 × 823 cm), *The Last Supper* from 1986 (203 × 1086 cm), *Camouflage* from 1986 (294 × 853 cm) and many other similarly large works were designated for the hall (26.3 × 16.85 m), which at 450 m² and with seven meter ceilings would have been an undoubtedly good fit. As to why Twombly wanted to visualize the situation by referring to layouts was unclear at first.

A first visit occurred on April 8 and 9, 2008 in Gaeta, followed by a second visit two months later on June 11 and 12. What Reinhold Baumstark, General Director of the Bavarian State Painting Collection, host and Museum Brandhorst representative, Udo Brandhorst, collector and benefactor and Armin Zweite, Director of the Udo and Anette Brandhorst Foundation got to see in the artist's studio was the answer to the

question regarding his possible intentions. In the intervening years he had painted six large pictures. In four works, each 252×750 cm, four plywood boards serve as substrates. Two paintings on canvas were also included, each 330 cm tall by 990 cm wide. The images and handwritten quotes in the pictures left no room for doubt that roses were the theme. Despite the chaos in the middle of the large, very bright studio in Gaeta, perhaps a former warehouse, the staggering sea of red was just as overwhelming as the heraldic presence of the motifs propped against the walls.

The painter did not comment further on the pictures, but the studio's shape, a large elongated rectangle, as well as the position of the smaller works on the free-standing longitudinal wall and one of the canvases at the front of the room, suggested that Twombly had created the pictures with the Museum Brandhorst in mind. Would the works be brought to Munich and shown in the room for which they had obviously been made? And what prospects did the artist connect with his compositions? A temporary or permanent installation? Such questions begged to be asked, but were neither articulated nor discussed during our visits. The assumption that Twombly, consciously or unconsciously, intended to supersede Warhol could not be denied without further ado.

In autumn 2008 the works were transported to Munich and hanged according to the artist's vision. In spring 2009 the Udo and Anette Brandhorst Foundation and the painter reached an agreement for the rose paintings to remain permanently in Munich, with the artist entitled to substitute one picture for another. The relatively homogenous colors were counteracted by a work entirely in blue. There was fear that Twombly would attempt a modification. After the museum opening in May 2009 Twombly visited the rooms dedicated to him on the top floor of the building. He let the deadline pass and did not return to the prospect of swapping out works. The room's definitive color contrast of commanding red and bold blue worked, making such an impression on him that he refrained from objection.

Let us turn our attention to the works. The artist settled on the arrangement in the model. Upon entering there are three works on plywood on the longitudinal wall measuring 252×740 cm (ills. 3–5). A large, three-piece canvas painting (330×990 cm) was planned for the front wall between two openings that lead to the adjacent room (ill. 6). Continuing along the right longitudinal wall was another image on plywood (252×740 cm; ill. 7) and all the way to the right the second canvas painting (330×990 cm; ill. 8). All of the works have a beige-pink background on which four round shapes, rose blossoms, are visible. In five of the paintings warm red and yellow tones dominate. The larger scale

work on the front wall and both of the related smaller pictures are almost entirely in line with this palette, except for a cool apple green on the far right of the large canvas (cf. ill. 6). The other three images are strongly offset. In intense blue and violet, this is especially true of the image on the left wall (cf. ill. 3–4). The large canvas across from it on the right wall stands out with its vast emptiness and reduced shapes (cf. ill. 8). The dominance of yellow, white and a bit of red very much sets this image apart from the other works.

A string of four stylized blossoms each delimits the structure of the images. The same is true of the individual shapes: circling, spiraling, entangled lines. They are painted largely with a wide brush; only occasionally does the painter use a thin brush, as in the sixth image, and in the left section of the blue composition the center is emphasized with colored chalk. The large, form-giving outline of the blossom is usually in a dark shade, followed by a medium-sized shape in a lighter shade, and lastly an even lighter shade in the center. Twombly avoids any clear alignment of the convex curves, recesses or gaps from which the blossom structure arises. Thin lines of running paint create veils of varying opacity, evoking a latent floating effect.

That Twombly repeats and varies motifs can be seen in his oeuvre from the very beginning. Conspicuous and absolutely exceptional here is the monumentalization of the subject and the staccato stringing together of four very similar motifs, each at a similar height and of similar size. Repetition and sequencing could stem from minimalism; however, they undermine its rigorous principles of geometric observance given the graphic flow of the brushstrokes and the distortion, saturation and superimposition manifested in them. The close parallel streams and trickles of paint flowing downward are the result of gravity, the consistency of the material, and the pressure of the paint-saturated brush on the canvas—they are not rooted in calculation, but rather allow chance to prevail within physical limitations.

Despite their several parallels each of the six paintings is coherent in itself. As a general rule closed shapes follow open ones in turns, mainly in the movement of reading, from left to right. This is particularly noticeable in the three paintings on the left wall. The lively contrast of yellow green and cadmium gives the fourth painting on the front wall of the hall a clear orientation. It corresponds with the heavy accent of the subsequent image on the right wall. Here extensive cadmium with yellow drifts from the center towards the left. In this picture the vibrant core surrounded in solid red is the source of the increasingly dominant Naples yellow from



3 Cy Twombly: *Untitled (Roses)*, Gaeta, 2008, acrylic, wax crayon on four wooden panels, 252.5 × 741.9 cm, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich, Udo and Anette Brandhorst Foundation, Museum Brandhorst



4 Cy Twombly: *Untitled (Roses)*, Gaeta, 2008, acrylic, wax crayon on four wooden panels, 252 × 733.3 cm, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich, Udo and Anette Brandhorst Foundation, Museum Brandhorst



5 Cy Twombly: *Untitled (Roses)*, Gaeta, 2008, acrylic, wax crayon on four wooden panels, 252.5 × 742.9 cm, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich, Udo and Anette Brandhorst Foundation, Museum Brandhorst



6 Cy Twombly: *Untitled (Roses)*, Gaeta, 2008, acrylic, wax crayon on canvas (3 parts), 330 × 990.3 cm, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich, Udo and Anette Brandhorst Foundation, Museum Brandhorst



7 Cy Twombly: *Untitled (Roses)*, Gaeta, 2008, acrylic, wax crayon on four wooden panels, 252.5 × 738.8 cm, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich, Udo and Anette Brandhorst Foundation, Museum Brandhorst



8 Cy Twombly: *Untitled (Roses)*, Gaeta, 2008, acrylic, wax crayon on canvas, 324 × 986 cm, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich, Udo and Anette Brandhorst Foundation, Museum Brandhorst



9 Studio shot of Cy Twombly's *Untitled (Roses)*, 2008 (ill. 4),
photo: Udo Brandhorst, April 2008

segment to segment. On the far right of the painting this shade blankets the red, crowding it into the background such that a connecting passage to the final large canvas on the right wall of the room seems plausible.

At this point one could make a series of further observations to bring home the point that each of the six paintings embodies a specific intention. What that looks like for each one must be omitted for the time being, yet how the quotes are integrated into the compositions deserves further explanation. In the first picture of the cycle the legible lines are located above the two blossoms in the middle. In the second picture the text is concentrated, resulting in an abrupt scission of the petals on the upper edge of the second blossom, very uncommon for the cycle overall. This is an annoying incident. The painter had in fact continued the blossom shape but then created a horizontal mark, painting over the area above this with orange ochre to make room for the text (ill. 9).

A similar phenomenon can be observed in the third image, as the text block cuts into one of the flowers at a right angle. In the fourth image the poetry is inscribed in the second blossom, which compromises their legibility. The yellow writing on the red background in the fifth composition is easy to decipher. In the last painting the stanza is written with a thin brush in the space between the two middle blossoms.

At our studio visit in April 2008 you could see that Twombly had jotted down the texts on small slips of paper, some of which he had taped to the canvas or plywood on their intended places (ills. 10–12) or elsewhere in the studio, including on a carrier box (ill. 13). The question to what extent such a variable fusion of writing and painting is motivated by content, if at all, can be answered by referring to the texts the artist used.

III

The considered arrangement of the paintings in the large room in the Museum Brandhorst reveals that the painter was going for an overall effect. It is not a collection of individual images but a concept in dialogue with the architectural conditions, manifesting in an overwhelming ensemble effect. On the level of structure and color the parallels are hard to miss. The same goes for the proportions, as the height-width ratio is 1:3 in each painting. Further, the works are linked with regards to content via the inscribed poetry. Each of the works is autonomous and could be shown in other contexts, but the painter's concept would not be reproducible in its entirety.³¹

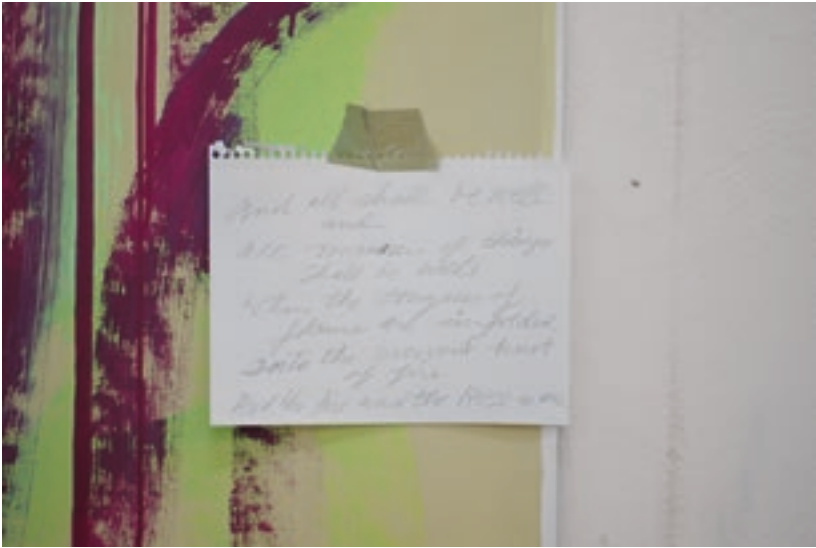
With the rose pictures the assumption arises that Twombly intended both to counterbalance the *Lepanto Cycle* and had a kind of total artwork in mind. Whereas the latter alludes to an historical event, a biomorphic subject is central here. It is the central range between history and nature that is embodied in both rooms, or more specifically, their works. In my assessment, Twombly did not hint at such ideas in conversations on site, but the presence of the 18 paintings total in both series at the Museum Brandhorst hardly lead to any other conclusion regardless of their structural, formal, coloristic and thematic differences.

Even if the paintings were obviously created in rapid succession, they were not painted quickly. Twombly waited, concentrated and then worked swiftly for as long as breath would carry him. Contrary to their appearance, exact calculation and reflection are the paintings' basis. Otherwise it would be incomprehensible as to how rebalancing such a radically disturbed equilibrium could work at all—heavy and light colors, cold and

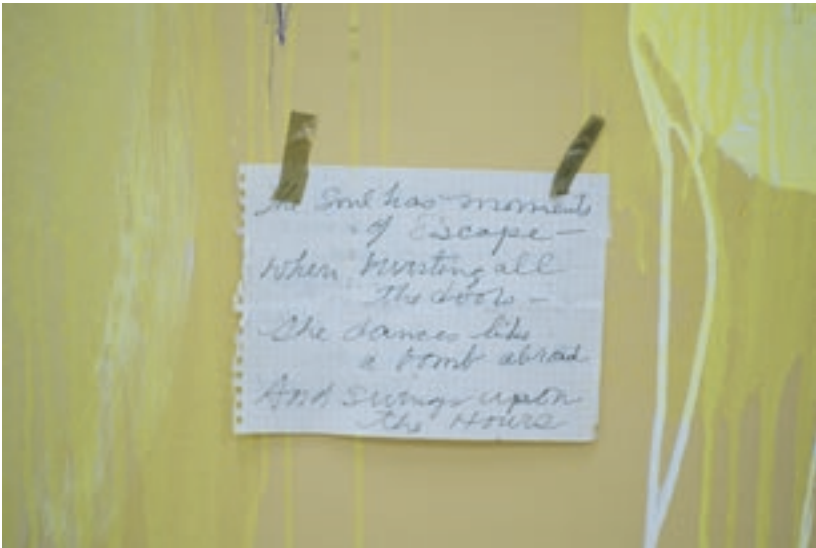
31 The artist had not originally planned any sculptures for the room, but he ended up accepting both the arrangement of four very different sculptures and the transcriptions of the verse in the pictures to the left and right of the entrances.



10 Studio shot of Cy Twombly's *Untitled (Roses)*, 2008 (ill. 6) with note (cf. ill. 11), photo: Udo Brandhorst, April 2008



11 Detail of ill. 10 with a quote from T.S. Eliot, photo: Udo Brandhorst, April 2008



12 Studio shot of Cy Twombly's *Untitled (Roses)*, 2008 (ill. 8) with a quote from Emily Dickinson, photo: Udo Brandhorst, April 2008



13 Studio shot of a slip of paper on a carrier box with a quote from Ingeborg Bachmann, photo: Udo Brandhorst, April 2008

warm, mid- and large-scale, the three paintings on the left longitudinal wall and the two very different images across from them—such that the 24 flowers bunch together in a grandiose harmony of color in four-four time as soon as you enter the room.

The play between repetition of form and variation, between color harmonies and contrasts bears traces in every mark. As is often the case in his work the lines are emotionally charged. “The line is the feeling,” Twombly told David Sylvester in 2001, “from a soft thing, a dreamy thing, to something hard, something arid, something lonely, something ending, something beginning. It’s like I’m experiencing something frightening.”³² And this is how we register fluid motion, a brisk flow back and forth, up and down. Then a decrescendo of looping motions, followed by repeated attempts to carry an elegant sweep further. Yet decisive for the paintings’ vivid nature are broken lines and halting brushstrokes, which occasionally evince a loss of control over momentum. In certain places there appears to be an exhausted pause, as if giving up with a shrug. Despite the declamatory large gestures, a cautious, at times downright stumbling

32 Sylvester 2001, 179.

motion is palpable at times, which, paradoxically, embodies stagnation or stillness more than eruption on a large scale. In order to evade routine and an overly fluid painting style, Twombly used wide brushes with two meter-long handles (cf. p. 95, ill. 10), a method that immediately evokes late Matisse, although Twombly's premise was completely different. In April 2008, the brushes, in containers, were leaning on the as yet unfinished pictures (cf. ill. 9).

Overall, both the physical rigor of the painting process and the conscious limitations imposed on guiding and managing the style of application, speed, and color flow become evident. In this way an inherent polarity becomes vivid: on the one hand a striving for reduction, or more specifically simplification; on the other hand, a broken, downright desperate, enforcing energy searching for form. The form of the moving contoured circle is thus always retained as an incomplete, partially disaggregated entity. And the convex and concave arches that make up the circle are thereby fraught with breaks, interruptions, doubles and overlays. The restrained pathos pervading everything allows for a subtle sense of the transitory, the fragility of one's object of consciousness. The vivid shape is revelatory of the artist's frailty, his impaired bodily state, an aspect Twombly amplified by using specific equipment (see above).

All of this instinctively brings to mind Claude Monet's *Les Nymphéas* in the Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris. Conceived at the outbreak of the First World War and with the artist's death in 1926, a major work completed by necessity, it looks back at the 19th century and is an outlook on the 20th century. Two oval rooms with four panorama-like paintings: Bodies of water extend to the edges of all of the pictures with water lilies and hanging weeping willows. The primarily blue and green hues bring everything together—water, light, air, flora. The free rhythm of the pulsating shapes and the view from above deny the possibility of perspective and horizon. The immaterial, atmospheric glow engenders specific moods; it is morning in the east, in the west evening twilight. A place of stillness, peace and meditation, all in all a masterpiece long underestimated, among the highlights in the history of painting which Monet dedicated to the nation of France.

In this sense, Monet's *Nymphéas* and Twombly's rose paintings are worlds apart. Artistic intentions and their related standards ultimately cannot be compared, in particular Monet's political motives, which have no equivalent in Twombly's oeuvre. And yet, despite considerable differences certain analogies are striking. The parallels, however, are confined to the creation of a homogenous ambience via a limited color scale, focus

on motif, repetition and a limited size range. The profoundly subtle color distinctions in Monet's scenery entice the viewer into extended contemplation and reflection, facilitating a quasi-disembodied experience. Twombly creates a different, similarly elevating effect—not merely through his painting, which in view of Monet appears deliberately rude, clumsy and full of disruptions—but by incorporating another sphere. This reveals itself less in the rigorous dominance of a single motif of similar shape and size and more in transcending the visual. The inscriptions in the painting are what binds the individual images together, such that the sum of the texts suggests a significance exceeding the aesthetic.

IV

Rose blossoms, an unusually concrete subject for Twombly, engrossed him deeply in his last years. Compared to his works from the '50s through the '90s the structural clarity and relatively good legibility are surprising. Their thematic focus places these works at the beginning of a series of variations that come to characterize the entirety of his later work. We can spare ourselves the jaunt through botany and make do with a few references to the cultural history of the rose.³³ In the 5th century Herodotus portrayed the rose gardens of Babylon and King Midas in Thrace. In *The Iliad*, Homer tells of weapons adorned in roses, rosy-fingered dawn and tells of Aphrodite anointing Hector's dead body in rose oil. For Sappho the rose is the queen of flowers. An object of cult worship in the Roman Empire, the rose was a medicinal plant in the Middle Ages and during the Renaissance became an essential part of European garden culture. Roses have been a symbol of love, peace and youthful vigor since antiquity. Ancient myths describe the origin of roses as the leavings of dawn upon the earth, Aphrodite rising from the sea and Adonis's blood. Pain is also an association. Due to the petals' frailty the rose is often a reference to impermanence and death. For a long time roses have been used to adorn the graves of departed loved ones, are carried in the hands when in mourning and are still the most common grave decoration. Their fast withering has made them the symbol of our final moments.

33 For an exhaustive list of possible meanings of the rose see: Marianne Beuchert: *Symbolik der Pflanzen* (Insel Taschenbuch 2004). Frankfurt a. M. / Leipzig 2004, 279 ff.

In painting this motif has an especially long tradition in still life, so it was not strange to see an abundance of color illustrations, including Dutch and French samples, in Twombly's studio: postcards, calendar pages, books and catalogs that must have provided him with inspiration (cf. ill. 1). What stands out here, however, is that Twombly limits himself to a specific point of view, namely, a bird's-eye view of an open blossom with its erratic petal edges. The three examples from Renoir's oeuvre in particular—visible in the figure included above, in the middle and below on the right—could have motivated such a point of view. Further, constraining the colors to light red and yellow may go back to the French painter or even to the adjacent candy advertisement (Peeps). Distance to 17th-century still lifes in the style of Jan Brueghels or Van Hulsdoncks is undeniable. The point of view integrates any such impulse in the consecutively unfurling flower petals. What is unique about the roses is that their opening petals do not reveal anything concealed beneath them. They are a recurring guise that does not give way to any distinct veiled object.

V

The texts in the paintings are poems or lines of poetry by Ingeborg Bachmann, Patricia Waters, T.S. Eliot, Rainer Maria Rilke and Emily Dickinson (cf. diagram on p. 372). Five of the images have verses circling the rose motif. For the sake of simplicity we will go through the paintings clockwise.

The poems in the first two paintings are translations of poems by Ingeborg Bachmann. They are from *Borrowed Time* (1953) and *Invocation of the Great Bear* (1956). At first, a haunting atmospheric visualization of danger (cf. ill. 3):

In the Storm of Roses
 wherever we turn in the storm
 of Roses
 The night is lit up by thorns,
 and the thunder
 of leaves, once so quiet within the bushes
 rumbling at our heels³⁴

34 The line breaks here correspond to Twombly's in his painting. The painter omitted lines or words that are crossed out.

Rilke		Dickinson	
Rose,		The Soul has	
O pure		moments	
Contradiction,		of Escape	
the desire		when twisting	
to be no ones		all the doors	
Sleep		She dances	
under so many		like a	
Petals		bomb	
		abroad	
		and swings	
		upon	
		the Hours	
Eliot			
and all shall be well and			
all manner of things shall			
be well			
when the tongues of flame			
are in-folded			
into the crowned knot			
of fire			
and the fire and the Rose			
are One			
Waters		Bachmann	
Rose		In the Storm of Roses	The night is lit up by thorns,
brief,		wherever we turn in the Storm	and thunder
brief in its beauty		of Roses	rumbling at our heels
but the			
scent			
better than fame			

Painting arrangement with the cited authors in the “Rosensaal” at the Museum Brandhorst in Munich
(Thierry Greub; transcriptions by Armin Zweite)

(Im Gewitter der Rosen
 Wohin wir uns wenden im Gewitter der Rosen
 Ist die Nacht von Dornen erhellt, und der Donner
 Des Laubs, das so leise war in den Büschen,
 Folgt uns jetzt auf dem Fuß)³⁵

Twombly does not cite fully, leaving the article “the” out of the fifth line and omitting the following line, “of leaves, once so quiet within the bushes,” entirely.

In the second painting there is verse from the poem, *Shadows Roses Shadows*, in which Twombly eliminates the death metaphor by literally cutting off the last two lines, “in alien waters / my shadow,” as is clear with the unusually poignant line in its place (cf. ill. 4 and 9):

Shadows Roses Shadows
 under an alien sky
 Shadows Roses Shadows
 on an alien earth
 between Roses and Shadows
~~in alien waters~~
~~my shadow~~

(Schatten Rosen Schatten
 Unter einem fremden Himmel
 Schatten Rosen
 Schatten
 Auf einer fremden Erde
 Zwischen Rosen und Schatten
 In einem fremden Wasser
 Mein Schatten)³⁶

Both of Bachmann's poems allude indirectly to the ineluctability of the aftereffects of the Second World War, to the “borrowed time” of restoration, in which the oblivion of historical events and fascist crime loom

35 The edition Twombly used could not be determined. Here *Songs in Flight: The Collected Poems of Ingeborg Bachmann*, translated and introduced by Peter Filkins. New York 1994, 60–61, has been used.

36 Ibid., 212–213.

large. The second poem implies the experience of alienness as the paralyzing condition of the 'I' between shadows and roses. The image of the rose surrounds the existence of the subject as a shadow. While in the first poem thorns shed light on existence, now only shadows constitute the 'I,' shadows beneath shadows to be precise.³⁷ We do not know the extent to which Twombly engaged with the various interpretations of Bachmann's poem, but it can be assumed that the poet's suggestive imagery captivated him in particular. Yet in the second painting he omits the core meaning the lines lead into ("in alien waters / my shadow"). Such an omission gives one reason to believe the reference to the speaking subject, or more specifically, the painter writing down the lines has also been edited out.

In the third painting on this wall (cf. ill. 5) there is poetry by Patricia Waters from her beautiful volume, *The Ordinary Sublime*.³⁸ The painter cites from the poem, *Attar* (the essential oil from rose petals, attar of roses). "Rose / brief, / brief in its beauty / but the / scent / better than fame"—again the theme of transience, now more clearly pronounced. Beauty withers swiftly, its seductive, scattered scent seems more pleasing than lasting fame. That is concise, and Waters captures it in an image as scant as it is precise:

Rose
brief,
brief in its beauty
but the
scent
better than fame

Little known in Europe, the poet was a friend of Twombly's. Her oeuvre is small and cannot be compared to the work of Ingeborg Bachmann, T.S. Eliot, Emily Dickinson or Rilke. In view of the other paintings in the series, it seems surprising for Twombly to include an author with an at best regional renown in the phalanx of world literature; however, the

37 On the interpretation of rose metaphors in Bachmann cf. Bettina von Jagow: *Ästhetik des Mythischen. Poetologien des Erinnerns im Werk von Ingeborg Bachmann* (Literatur – Kultur – Geschlecht. Studien zur Literatur- und Kulturgeschichte, eds. Inge Stephan / Sigrid Weigel, Große Reihe, vol. 25). Cologne/Weimar/Vienna 2003, 144 ff.

38 Waters 2006, 75.

quality of the verse accounts for this, as does their longstanding personal acquaintanceship and friendship.³⁹

Waters's poetry collection, *The Ordinary Sublime*, is often about what the title suggests, namely, the exaltation of simple actions. Here the everyday plays an important role. And the poem the book is titled after begins with the image of a women peeling potatoes for dinner. It ends with the following lines: "Something / in that calm repetitive action / goes for nothing / and for everything, / another day, another meal, / same as life, might be life."⁴⁰ In a larger passage overwritten with "Made Things," there are several allusions to prominent artists, among them Tizian, Vermeer, Hopper, Rothko, Motherwell and others. An affinity for Twombly is apparent in the painter's repeated reference to Patricia Waters's poems, as for instance in one of the central paintings in *Coronation of Sesostris* (HB V 8/VI; cf. p. 123, ill. 3).⁴¹ The poem cited in the rose-cycle painting turns up again on a sculpture by Twombly.⁴²

What interested the painter in Patricia Waters was presumably more than just personal, such as a mutual sense of connection between Southerners,⁴³ but was rather based on her style of poetry which touched on all the themes Twombly was dealing with: a nation and its people, a simple existence, nature, seasons, age, eros and importantly, the allusions and subjects connected to the Mediterranean. *Bacchus & Ariadne*, *Eidolon*, *Sapiens*, *Nemesis*, *On the Island of Hydra*, *What Pindar Means*: these are the titles of some of her poems. Unhinged, levitating, a style of free verse that

39 Here an explanatory note regarding Patricia Waters's work is in order. Born in Nashville, Tennessee, she studied English literature and history, participated in several archaeological excavations in Europe and earned a masters degree in the U.S. Following this, she worked as a teacher and journalist in Memphis and New Orleans and was engaged in civic activities. She has several children. Various scholarships allowed her to improve her connections with important authors. In 1998 she completed her PhD in English literature. In 2003 and 2004 she was writer in residence at the University of Tennessee. She lives in Athens, Tennessee.

40 Waters 2006, 28.

41 The poem is called, *Now is the drinking* (*Nunc est bibendum*) and refers to an ode by Horaz (1st Book, XXXVII), cf. Ibid., 31. Here, too, the painter quotes with a number of omissions that seem more formal (lack of space, for instance) than due to content. Compare Dietrich Wildung's contribution in this volume.

42 Letter from Patricia Waters to the author of this text from February 25, 2012.

43 The same seems to be the case in the five-piece work, *Analysis of the Rose as Sentimental Despair* (HB IV 27) because the title refers to a poem by Susan Wood, a poet currently teaching at Rice University in Houston, Texas.

reads easily is what must have inspired the painter, especially considering how it accommodates his own ephemeral way of writing.

Moving on from the three paintings on the left wall with the quotes from Ingeborg Bachmann and Patricia Waters, let us turn to the work on the front wall of the room, which provides the focal point of the cycle (cf. ill. 6). At 330 × 990 cm, the large painting is the formal midpoint—whether the same holds in terms of content shall remain open for the time being. On plywood and set closely together, four planes comprise each picture. The picture on canvas consists of three sections, one wide with two flowers in the middle and two half as wide to the right and left: a triptych to the extent that the two outer pieces are set apart from the two in the middle, albeit slightly, so that the classic tripartite structure delineates one's first impression. When the viewer's gaze is focused on the irregular rhythm and clumsy progression of the brushstrokes, the work's lively nature reveals itself in the linear interiority of the dominant circular shapes. They, too, seem to be floating, moving in the free zone along the upper edge, leaving behind the ever-thinning current of rivulets.

On the left plane small convex sweeps predominate, concentrating increasingly from the periphery. They merge into a conglomerate of rose madder lake, hardly differentiated internally and situated slightly below and to the left of the painting's center. In the next blossom to the right the mesh untangles. It appears more matte, yet creates a three-winged shape in the middle. Because the green lines are covered in translucent red they forfeit their brightness. Radiance remains virtually palpable beneath the dulling effect. In the third part, another step to the right, the morphological elements disintegrate, dissolving into feeble sagging brushstrokes, as if a feeling of faintness had drained them of their power. On the fourth section all the way to the right a toxic iridescent yellow green induces a radical reversal as it threatens to triumph over the triple sweeps, now concave and widening, in the lower segment of the image. Apparently, the artist added the radiant green stroke last and with this salient shade gave the composition two things at once: a final chord and a threat to its balance.

The compact red of the adjacent painting on the right side wall, however, offsets a considerably endangered imbalance—which implies that Twombly did take spatial positioning into consideration, coordinating the rose images with one another. Let us note that red dominates this work and the two paintings flanking it on the side walls and that yellow and orange balance them out. Yet with the green on the far right of the central work they have a fixed point, prompting most visitors to move toward

the entrance into the next room. As indicated, the large painting on the front wall is situated between two openings that lead to another exhibition room dedicated to Twombly. Simplified and exaggerating the facts, the configuration of the three paintings can be understood as a triptych whose echo is partly incorporated and partly counteracted in the three other works, where bold blue, dark violet (on the left wall) and creamy white (on the right wall to the right), in concert with the predominant red, create nothing less than a celebratory mood.

In the main painting on the front wall in the second blossom from the left, the painter has written lines from a poem by T.S. Eliot. Eliot may very well have felt connected to Twombly, as both were American-born, established themselves in Europe and were able to create something new and distinct out of the relation between two cultures. The painter discovered the poet early on and during his university studies became aware of a principal work, *The Four Quartets*.⁴⁴ The lines he quotes comes from this most prominent Eliot poem:

and all shall be well and
all manner of things shall
be well
when the tongues of flame
are in-folded
into the crowned knot
of fire
And the fire and the Rose
are One

The Four Quartets were published separately in the late '30s/early '40s and published as a book in 1943.⁴⁵ The passage Twombly cites is the very end of

⁴⁴ Cf. London 2008, 50. Twombly owned an array of first editions, including *The Waste Land* (published in 1922 at the same time as *Ulysses* by James Joyce). And in a conversation with Nicholas Serota, Twombly hinted that one of his next paintings would include lines from Eliot, and he quotes: "Summer surprises us ... / with a shower of rain / we stopped in the colonnade / and went on in sunlight, into the Hofgarten." (Here he means the Munich Hofgarten.)

⁴⁵ In two places Twombly deviates from the original. I will not elaborate on that further, nor will I discuss the extraordinary complexity of the poem. *Little Gidding*, the title of the last quartet, refers to an Anglican community that was destroyed in the 17th century.

the poem. The works, “And all shall be well” refer to the mystical writings of an anonymous nun from the 14th century known by her religious name, Julian of Norwich. Beyond this, the work is interspersed with a plethora of allusions and quotations, where Dante takes on preeminent significance. The crown mentioned, (“crowned knot”) refers to the moment when Virgil crowns Dante at the entrance to the earthly paradise the heathen poet himself cannot enter. As the rose petals are actually tongues of fire, this could be a reference to purgatory. For Eliot the image of the union of fire and rose signifies a moment “where art can avail us no further.”⁴⁶

The fire Eliot alludes to can destroy everything. The idea of the world going up in flames and literally leaving ash in its wake lingers in the background. As Eliot was involved as a volunteer during the German air raids in London, his experiences may be present in these lines. The fire can also be understood as purification, as if Eliot were attempting to name the alternatives to the inferno or purgatory.⁴⁷

Eliot presents readers of *The Four Quartets* with a “deeply paradoxical set of problems.” Each of the four parts deals with both humans’ redemption from time and the redemption of time itself. Boundedness to time and timelessness are opposed, yet move around and through one another. What did not occur seems as equally relevant as what actually occurred.⁴⁸ In his seminal essay, “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1919) Eliot is concerned with how originality, or more specifically, innovation relates to tradition. Before a new work emerges, according to Eliot, the order previously in force must be concluded. “... For order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. Whoever has approved this idea of order... will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past.”⁴⁹ In a tradition as Eliot understands it, basically anything can be cited, yet based on the premise that what it cited expresses

46 Cf. Martin Warner: *A Philosophical Study of T.S. Eliot's Four Quartets*. New York 1999, 115 f.

47 Ibid., 110.

48 Cf. Marianne Thormählen: Zeit und Geschichte in T.S. Eliots *Four Quartets*. In: *T.S. Eliot, poeta doctus, Tradition und die Konstitution der klassischen Moderne*, ed. Jürgen Klein (Britannia, Texts in English, vol. 7). Frankfurt a.M. 2003, 205–216.

49 T.S. Eliot: *Tradition and the Individual Talent* (1919), online: <http://www.bartleby.com/200/sw4.html>, chapter 4 (June 16, 2016).

something specifically related to each specific present. Ultimately, the question is how the memory of the past is represented in the present. "Being a reconstruction of the past *in the present* means that memory (in common with Eliot's concept of tradition) is always determined, limited and made possible by what is visible at that particular moment in time and space. We cannot know the past as such; we can only access it by reconstructing it in the present. This important thought is inscribed in many of the complicated statements of Eliot's essay."⁵⁰ It is possible that Twombly, with his citations from highly dissimilar sources, was guided by Eliot's line of thinking—one that originates in an all-encompassing tradition whose significance is rooted in permanence. The concept of the whole, central for Eliot, is closely linked to the concept of order. The present and past depend on one another as do forgetting and remembering. A notion that, under the influence of contemporary experiences of fragmentation, or the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous, and especially postmodern thought, seems to have become obsolete.⁵¹

Poetry fascinated Twombly time and again, often inspiring his pictures. "I like something to jumpstart me," he remarked in an interview, continuing: "I like poets because I can find a condensed phrase... My greatest one to use was Rilke, because of his narrative, he's talking about the essence of things. I always look for the phrase."⁵²

In the painting to the right, Twombly cites lines Rilke included in his will regarding his tombstone at the church in Raron in the Canton of Valais, Switzerland, where it can be found today (cf. ill. 7; cf. p. 346, ill. 10):

Rose,	(Rose, oh reiner Widerspruch, Lust
O pure	Niemandes Schlaf zu sein unter soviel
Contradiction,	Lidern.)
the desire	
to be no ones	
Sleep	
under so many	
Petals	

50 Cf. Aleida Assmann: Exorcizing the Demon of Chronology: T.S. Eliot's Re-invention of Tradition. In: *T.S. Eliot and the Concept of Tradition*, eds. Giovanni Cianci / Jason Harding. Cambridge 2007, 21.

51 Cf. *Ibid.*, 24.

52 London 2008, 50.

Of all Rilke's poetry, the inscription on his tombstone is among the most famous. In it one sees a final legacy, a sum of his insights regarding life and death, nature and art, metaphor and meaning. Its obscurity, its mysteriousness has captivated generations of readers just as it did Twombly as well. Not least because of its complexity, the poem, a haiku, has yielded a plethora of exhaustive interpretations that take an existential stance, according to Otto Friedrich Bollnow, are religiously motivated, or argue along phenomenological lines, as is the case with Käte Hamburger.⁵³ For our purposes these can be spared. Let us note, however, that for a poet of his time, the rose, the old Western symbol of the *unio mystica*, was an occasion for delight and meditative reverence. Here it becomes a metaphor of the "pure" contradiction between sultry sensuality and spiritual clarity, between vividness and aesthetic presence. As "no one's / sleep / under so many / petals" it becomes code for the poet's existence. The German "*Lider*" (eyelids) is ambiguous, signifying both the protective skin of the eyes and the *Lieder*, songs or poems, that Rilke created and left behind. The poet, the author of this unique epigraph, disappears behind the blossom of his work, as nothingness, as sleep that no one sleeps.⁵⁴ Viewed thusly, the rose stands for the poet who envisions the world in an artwork. The rose of the tombstone can also be understood as a work of art. As such it is as self-referential as nature. It does not depend on outsiders and contains part of an inner life comprised of unspeakable desires and intuitions that never come to fruition.⁵⁵

Twombly did not quote Rilke exactly here, although he used an accurate English translation in earlier paintings.⁵⁶ '*Lider*,' (no 'e') should be translated as 'lids,' but the painter used the expression 'petals.' An arguable transformation, however, considering that Rilke repeatedly speaks of roses and rose petals on closed eyes.⁵⁷ Rilke's verse in French, a cycle of just under 30 poems—plays a central role for Twombly in a second

53 Cf. Joachim Wolff: *Rilkes Grabschrift. Manuskript- und Druckgeschichte, Forschungsbericht, Analysen und Interpretation*. Heidelberg 1983.

54 Hans Egon Holthusen: *Rainer Maria Rilke in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten*, (Rowohlt's Monographien, vol. 22). Reinbek/Hamburg 1958, 163.

55 Cf. Wolff 1983, op. cit., 183.

56 *Analysis of the Rose as Sentimental Despair*, 1985 (HB IV 27/IV; cf. p. 343, ill. 9); *Venere Sopra Gaeta*, 1988 (HB IV 48, 49).

57 Cf. O.F. Bollnow: *Rilke*. Stuttgart ²1956 (1951), 297.

cycle of five rose pictures, which is directly related to the works discussed here (cf. p. 49, ill. 6.1–2).⁵⁸

The last picture in the series, painted large-scale on a continuous canvas, is perhaps the most unwieldy, and compared to the others it appears rather austere in its formal and coloristic reduction (cf. ill. 8). This is fitting for the poet, Emily Dickinson, whose approximately 1,800 poems remained in obscurity during her lifetime. Their reception, which would ultimately have a large impact, did not occur until the middle of the 20th century. The refusal of titles or other ascribed meanings, variable meter, half rhyme, syntactic rule-breaking, collocations, disconcerting images, the use of slang, abrupt lines of thought without connecting links and metonymic diction were all recognized and valued for their importance much later.

Celan rendered some of her poems. Dickinson is placed on par with the great American poets, including her contemporary Walt Whitman—and rightly so. Her thinking, put rather simply, revolves around imagination, subjectivity, the seasons, life and death, time and eternity. Her motto, “Tell all the truth, but tell it slant,” (in the sense of unusual, surprising or awry), finds expression in the four lines Twombly cites from poem 512 from 1962 (ill. 14). As the painter made modifications here as well, I have put the original version next to his:

58 Cf. Cy Twombly: *The Rose* (Gal.-Kat. Gagosian Gallery London 2009). n.p. 2009. The five pictures were created in 2008 and measure 252 × 740 cm each, the same size as four of the works in the Museum Brandhorst (cf. p. 49, ill. 6.1). The pictures have a vibrant turquoise background. There are rose blossoms on three panels, and Rilke's poetry is on the fourth panel to the right. Twombly cites only half of Rilke's poems—each consists of two four-line stanzas—due to space. But he often writes each one twice, that is, alternating by line in different colors, which further impedes their legibility. Or, as in the first painting of the series, he uses lines from two different poems. Such observations confirm his highly free approach to the originals. The painter takes up individual formulations in particular, writing them in his own specific style. In terms of the aesthetic presence of each of the works, coherence and meaning as informed and determined by context are less important to him. Visual features are thus inconclusive with regards to Twombly's intentions and convictions.

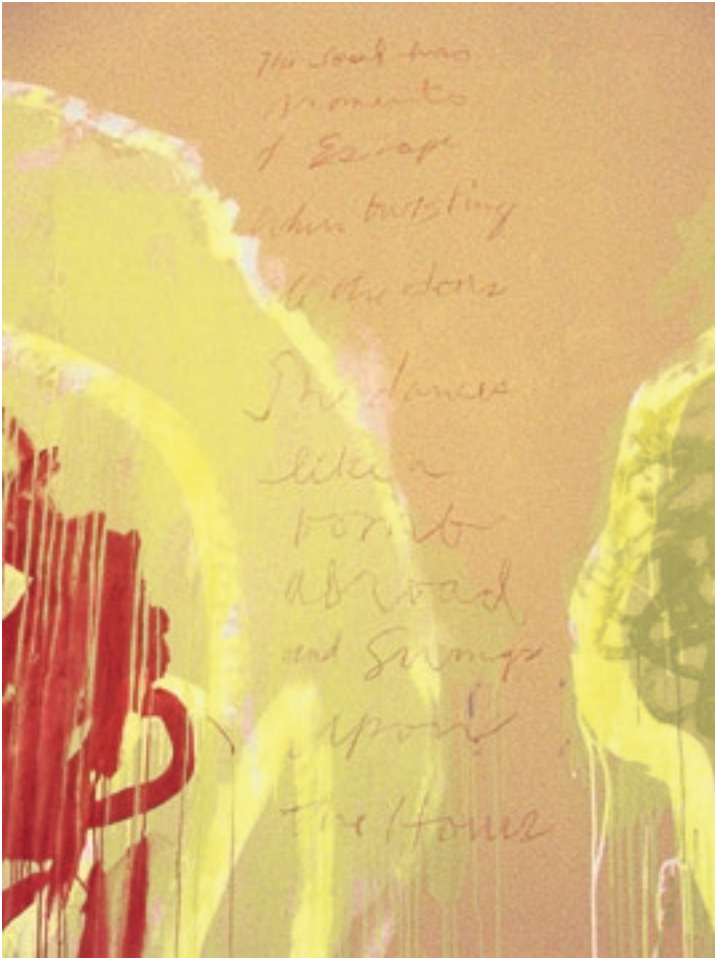
The Soul has
 moments
 of Escape
 when twisting
 all the doors
 She dances
 like a
 bomb
 abroad
 and swings
 upon
 the Hours

The soul has moments of Escape—
 When bursting all the doors—
 She dances like a Bomb, abroad,
 And swings upon the Hours,
 [...] ⁵⁹

What moved Twombly to include lines from this poem in the sparsest, most open painting of the group? A glance at the blue picture hanging across from it with the dark violet hues makes this contrast palpable. The beginning sets the tone of the whole ensemble. Succinctly, what is careless and runs the risk of making the poem a banality can be paraphrased as such: The soul resembles a mummy. It ossifies in fear as horror approaches and destroys love. The soul flees, breaks open the doors, dances around dangerously like a bomb and escapes time like a bee, which banished from its rose, feels free and experiences noon as paradise. The soul is placed under constraint, taken away like a wretch in chains. Its songs, riddled with nails, cannot convey its cry when horror welcomes it (the soul) again.

Twombly deliberately chose this image of flight, which in the overall context sends a positive signal: the soul bursts open the tomb doors and, danger impending, escapes, dancing away from time, transience and death. These lines have a fundamentally melancholy tenor. Art neither prevails over nor objectifies sorrow and pain, torture and death. Whether or not the painter read Dickinson in this way, understanding his works in the sense of these poems, we do not know. However, that he was inspired only by Dickinson's paradoxical imagery seems rather unlikely when considering the context in which the lines appear.

⁵⁹ *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson. New York 1960, 250. The poem continues in the next stanza by naming the rose: "As do the Bee—delirious borne— / Long Dungeoned from his Rose—[...]"



14 Detail of Cy Twombly's *Untitled (Roses)*, 2008 (ill. 8)
with a quote from Emily Dickinson

Of course, one would have to go into the relationship between language and painting in Twombly's work in more detail, a topos in the research on his oeuvre, but that is outside the scope of this paper. Let us remember a comment the the artist made a few years ago: "I never really separated painting and literature because I've always used reference."⁶⁰

60 London 2008, 45.

VI

Let us briefly summarize our observations. We are looking at six paintings created for a specific room in the Museum Brandhorst. The common motif throughout is the rose. It is depicted four times in each painting. Poetry is inscribed in each of the images, and compared to earlier works it is clearly legible.

With Ingeborg Bachmann we have an atmospheric picture—the storm of roses—while in the lines in the second painting shadows are conjured, their own shadows in an alien earth in alien water. These are metaphorical forebodings of death. With Patricia Waters the impermanence of flower and scent is favored over fame. Eliot merges flames and roses into one. The inferno changes into purgatory. Following this is the epitaph on Rilke's grave with the central concepts "desire," "pure contradiction," "no one's sleep," "petals," where the painter uses petals instead of lids (*Lider*). The ambiguity of "no one's sleep" and the fact that the poet specified the lines for his tombstone lends them a particular weight; whereas hope for survival in nature counters the premonition of death. With Emily Dickinson Twombly edits out the biomorphic imagery. There is no rose in the citation, although the poem designates the rose as that which banishes the bee. In the last picture of the series the painter focuses instead on the soul breaking free from its box, that is, escaping the body and slipping away from time. The formal equivalent of this inclination toward flight and dissolution is embodied in the loose structure and conspicuously lighter colors.

Taken as a whole, an atmosphere of blossoming emerges in the room with several variously explicit symbols of frailty, weakening and decay. Formally, structurally and on the level of color, what manifests at first glance as a highly in tune group of partially interrupted homogeneity is to some extent subverted by the metaphors of transience in the inscribed citations. Not only do the paintings relate to one another formally and thematically—that is already evident—but the cited verse also creates an internal coherence that manifests as a celebration of life and nature, as persecution and threat (Bachmann), fleeting happiness (Waters), purgatory (Eliot), legacy (Rilke) and psychic affliction and the (failed) escape from time (Dickinson).

Bridging one image to the next is difficult; this is prompted, however, by the artistic presence of the rose blossoms and their repeated mention.

A coherent iconography does not emerge, but a cohesion does in this respect: all six paintings can be understood as an expression of the finality of existence. With their reduced range of shapes and limited range of color these pictures appear just as majestic as they do prosaic, and with the repeated rose motif Twombly celebrates nature. Through the poetic frame of reference the embodiment of blossoming and withering gains another horizon of meaning that includes, or more specifically, suggests one's own existence. Leaving all contingencies, breaks and inherent contradictions of this picture series and abstracting from the euphoric impressions the paintings evoke, one cannot preclude the suspicion that the painter reflected on his own death while working on the cycle. The inherent authenticity in the images lends the space a suggestive power, an almost magical presence, without transfixing or overpowering the viewer. It is, in other words, a unique transmission or synthesis of the sublime with the decorative, that is, a linkage of mutually exclusive approaches. The marvelous is established in such seemingly clear and simple, or more specifically, evident way that it evokes an abundance of insights and prospects that have a long-lasting effect and gain in intensity over time.

Viewed thusly we have the artist's late work with all of its particularities, fleetingness and laxity as well as an immense condensation of and concentration on what is essential. With his painting, as manifested in this cycle and subsequent works, Twombly aimed for the moment where art, to close with Eliot, "can avail us no further."

My concentration on the poets' verse that captivated the painter time and again can lead to conceptually determined insights. And these only interfere with aesthetic experience. Aesthetic experience is not conceptual experience. Aesthetic experience, following Martin Seel, "remains bound to the sensuous and significative event and thus the specific appearance of the artistic objects. All artistic perception originates in appearing and is intent on appearing."⁶¹ Twombly was always aware of that. In a note Kirk Varnedoe found in Bassano's studio, the message was clear: "The image cannot be dispossessed of a primordial freshness which ideas can never claim."⁶² This ascribes a specific function to the poetry in Twombly's pictures, yet cautions against attributing to them a heft that undermines the aesthetic presence of the works.

61 Martin Seel: *Ästhetik des Erscheinens*. Munich 2000, 192.

62 New York 1994, 52. Varnedoe references *ibid.*, 64, n.182, the source of the formulation in: Ransom, John Crowe, *The World's Body*. New York 1938, 115.

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IV. IMAGE AND TEXT IN CY TWOMBLY

*... that painting of mine in Philadelphia? ... It's called
Fifty Days in Iliam: I spelt it I-L-I-A-M, which is not correct.
It's U-M. But I wanted that, I wanted the A for Achilles;
I always think of A as Achilles.*

Cy Twombly, 2000



1 Cy Twombly: *Untitled*, Bassano in Teverina, 16 August 1990, acrylic, oil stick, lead pencil, wax crayon on handmade paper with irregular size, 70.5×56 cm, Collection Cy Twombly Foundation

THIERRY GREUB

“TO REVALORIZE POETRY NOW”: ON CY TWOMBLY’S LITERARY INSCRIPTIONS

Cy [...] uses words with meaning, as well as fragments of poems. A collaboration of image and words, not just form but also their meaning. It is rather new in modern painting, and I like it. It is a courageous way of facing the problem of painting. Octavio Paz, 1995

A SWISS IN ROME

In 1991, a young Swiss student traveled to Rome. He was planning to interview a famous artist—something that was supposed to bring himself fame later on. But the artist turned him down. The object of Hans Ulrich Obrist’s plans was Cy Twombly. Nevertheless, Obrist, perhaps the most successful curator and promoter of contemporary art today, claims that the encounter with Cy Twombly changed his life: “When I was eighteen years old,” he said in a 2003 interview with artist Tacita Dean, “I went to Rome to visit Cy Twombly, which was a life-changing experience.”¹

1 Obrist 2012, 23 (Interview I: *Hope*. Tacita Dean’s studio, Berlin, August 18, 2003).—Tacita Dean wrote her thesis on Cy Twombly and has been influenced by him in many ways; in 2011, she shot a 29-minute film about him called *Edwin Parker*. She writes (in Dean 2008, 34) about Obrist’s meeting Twombly in Rome: “In 1991, Hans Ulrich Obrist approached Twombly for an interview. Refusing to be drawn into talking about his work, Twombly met him in a café in Rom and talked about poetry. He was buying poets’ manuscripts. Poetry was disappearing from our cultural consciousness and this concerned him greatly.

Although Twombly, who was almost 60 at the time, didn't grant Obrist an interview, the two of them did have a conversation in a café in Rome in which Twombly told him what was close to his heart:

He actually pointed out something that was very interesting: that he thinks it's a terrible thing that poetry is no longer valorized in our society. There is basically no economy for poetry any more unless it is best-selling poetry. He said that poetry is disappearing and that this frightens him; that you could ask for the name of a young poet of our generation that you really like and for the first time you probably wouldn't know.²

In a subsequent interview with Tacita Dean in 2010, Obrist describes Twombly's concern not as a pure diagnosis of the time with respect to knowledge of poetry but rather as a fundamental problem of contemporary art: "When I met Cy for the first time, I went to see him in Rome when I was a student and he said, for him, one of the big problems in the art world now is that there are not enough bridges being built to literature and that that has somehow gone missing, particularly also in relation to poetry."³ Twombly, who, as Obrist later remarked, "[didn't want] to speak about art at all but rather only about literature" even gave the budding curator a tip for the future that he

No one recalled poetry as they used to; no one remembered lines from poems as they used to; it had become a waning art form. I was fascinated by this story [...].—I assume the meeting took place in 1991 because this is the year provided by Tacita Dean (as noted) and Obrist seems to confirm the year in another interview when he speaks of the "1990s" (in: *ART* from 4.08.2008, online at: http://www.art-magazin.de/szene/9943/hans_ulrich_obrist_interview?p=2 [May 15, 2013]); if, however, he was really 18 years old on his trip to Rome and not 23, then the meeting would have taken place in 1986 (or 1987).—The quotation from Octavio Paz comes from *Del Roscio* 2002, 261 (first in: Paz 1995, 181–182).—For discussions and valuable suggestions, I would like to express my gratitude (as always) to Krystyna Greub-Frącz.

2 Obrist 2012, 23.

3 Ibid., 68 (Interview III: *A Conversation at the Hochschule für bildende Künste*. Hamburg, June 2010).—The interview took place on June 26, 2010 at the conference *Interview | Conversation. Formen und Foren des Künstlergesprächs seit Vasari*; published as: *Das Interview. Formen und Foren des Künstlergesprächs*, eds. Michael Diers / Lars Blunck / Hans Ulrich Obrist (Fundus, 206). Hamburg 2010.

should never forget⁴ and which he later honored as well: "Cy told me to take care of poets. 'Poets need you as much as artists need you and poetry is neglected'."⁵ If one opts to take Obrist's comment seriously, then Twombly understood his purpose as an artist to be a builder of bridges between literature and art. To Obrist, Twombly defined his artistic task as the elevation of poetry: "Cy told me that he sees his role as an artist to revalorize poetry now and he is buying original scripts of poems to look after."⁶

Keeping in mind Cy Twombly's pointed statements on the significance of literature in his artistic oeuvre (as reported by Obrist), I have allowed the quotations from poetry and prose that are inscribed in his drawings, paintings, and sculptures to frame the subject of my postdoctoral dissertation (*Habilitation*). The following cursory notes should, in this sense, provide an overview—with statistical tables—of Twombly's use of literary quotations with regards to their quantity, type, and interpretive context.⁷ Twombly himself suggested grappling with the literary quotes he

4 In response to the question, "Your greatest passion right now is the connection between literature and art. Why?" Obrist answered: "Cy Twombly put this virus in me. When I first met him in the 1990s, he told me that he doesn't understand why curators and museums do not build a bridge to literature. He didn't want to speak about art at all, just about literature." (in: *ART* from 4.08.2008, online at: http://www.art-magazin.de/szene/9943/hans_ulrich_obrist_interview?p=2 [May 15, 2013]).

5 Obrist 2012, 101 (Interview IV: *After the Event*. On the train from Hamburg to Berlin, June 2010). Cf. Obrist's *Everstill* (2007/08) exhibition at the Federico García Lorca House in Granada.

6 *Ibid.*, 23.

7 The goal of my post-doctoral dissertation, which I completed in November 2015, is to present the most complete overview possible of the extant (literary) inscriptions with the corresponding, correct English translation, using the previously identified quotations as the point of departure. (Tab. 1 provides a preliminary overview).—With few exceptions, the catalogues raisonnés provide the foundation for my collection of quotations: Those by Heiner Bastian for the paintings (HB I–V, 1992–2009), by Yvon Lambert (YL VI, 1979 and YL VII, 1991) and now by Nicola Del Roscio (NDR Z I, 2011 and NDR Z II, 2012) for the drawings as well as the one by Nicola Del Roscio for Twombly's sculptures (NDR S I, 1997); to those one must add the Munich exhibition catalogue of the sculptures (Munich 2006) as well as two Pessoa drawings in Seidner 2000, 144.—Volume III of the drawings by Nicola Del Roscio from 2013 could not be included in this interim calculation.—Along with Bastian's volume for drawings (HB Z), other volumes aided the discovery of literary quotations:

used when, in an interview discussing *Untitled (Say Goodbye, Catullus, to the Shores of Asia Minor)*, which contains numerous such textual quotations, he expressed the wish: “[...] The text. It would be lovely to have something with the text [...]”.⁸

“DELIGHT LIES IN FLAWED WORDS AND STUBBORN SOUND”

Although Twombly’s paintings furnished with texts are among his best known works, it turns out that of the 641 works collected by Heiner Bastian in the *Catalogue Raisonné of the Paintings* (covering 1948 to 2007), only 97—that is, 15.13%—bear inscriptions making use of one or more quotations.⁹ Among the sculptures, of the 179 listed in the *Catalogue Raisonné of Sculpture* by Nicola Del Roscio and in the Munich Catalog, the number is 24 sculptures, equivalent to 13.4%.¹⁰

In the research, the opinion is widely expressed that the artist wrote the inscriptions in his drawings and paintings freely and often inaccurately from memory or at random from literary sources, modifying or “mutilating” the quotations. In an influential statement, Kirk Varnedoe describes Twombly as the “most literate yet least literal of artists.”¹¹ In

Vol. 1 of Lambert (YL VI), the current oeuvre catalogues of drawings by Del Roscio (NDR Z I and NDR Z II) and the aforementioned Munich catalogue with sculptures from 1997–2005 (Munich 2006), above all Baden-Baden 1984, Engelbert 1985, Berlin 1994 (fn. 95, 122, 126, 141, 178 and 180–182), Göricke 1995 (esp. 118–140), Langenberg 1998 as well as Basel 2000, Hochdörfer 2001, Leeman 2005, London 2008, Vienna 2009, Dulwich 2011 and Stuttgart 2011.—The catalogues raisonnés published thus far do not include the most recent works; as a result, inscriptions are lacking starting in 2008 for the paintings, 1998/2006 for the sculptures, 1985 for prints; for the drawings, both Lambert volumes are available as well as Del Roscio’s briskly published oeuvre catalogues, which include the years 1951–1960 as well as 1973–1982, in this regard and in regard to the three volumes of drawings by Del Roscio, cf. my review: Greub 2014.

8 Interview 2011, 28.

9 HB I–V.—Status as of June 2013.—The inscriptions that only “repeat” the artwork’s title are excluded here; included here are Twombly’s notepads, insofar as photographs of them are extant (cf. esp. Dean 2011).

10 NDR S I and Munich 2006.—For the drawings, a comparable overview would not be meaningful as a result of the missing catalogue raisonné (cf. fn. 7).

11 Berlin 1994, 52.—Robert Pincus-Witten writes, for example: “[...] The poetical quotations and citations that appear in Twombly’s works are, as often as

light of my research, this is a view that warrants revision. In every case known to me so far, Twombly had, on the contrary, painstakingly “copied” the source material word for word. True, he slightly modifies quotations slightly or omits individual words, but he undertakes such abridgements and small changes very rarely—and with the aim of safeguarding the effectiveness of the newly found quote and rendering it as memorable as possible. The drawing *Untitled* from 1990 stands as an excellent example of this approach (ill. 1):¹²

Delight lies in
flawed words and stubborn
sound

WS.

CT 16 Aug 1990

B. in Ta

In the original, the section of the poem by the American poet Wallace Stevens, taken from the 1942 collection of poems *Parts of a World*, reads as follows:

[...]

Note that, in this bitterness, delight,
Since the imperfect is so hot in us,
Lies in flawed words and stubborn sounds.¹³

From the poem *The Poems of our Climate*, Twombly took the final verse and contracted it with the noun “delight” to present a unity that—like the original—is divided into three lines, thereby lending the quotation a new poetic quality.¹⁴ By concentrating on the selection, “Delight lies in flawed

not, transcribed from memory.” Pincus-Witten 1994, 23, fn. 5.—These statements can now be corrected with the knowledge of the exact English source or translation that Twombly used.

¹² *Untitled*, 1990; Ill. in: New York 2004, 67.

¹³ Wallace Stevens: *Hellwach, am Rande des Schlafs. Gedichte*, ed. by Joachim Sartorius. Munich 2011, 156.

¹⁴ In the drawing *Untitled*, 1990 (from the same day) Twombly uses the same quotation but divides it differently on the canvas: “Delight lies in Flawed words / and stubborn sound / W.S. / CT. Bassano in Teverina / Aug 16 1990” (Ill. in: Berlin 1994, Cat. No. 114).

words and stubborn sounds,” the painter eliminates the poem’s “bitter” tones; he changes “sounds” to “sound” and condenses the quotation into one sentence that can be understood as the author’s poetological personal statement on his manner of inscribing text in his art works and on their reception by his audience: “Delight lies in / flawed words and stubborn / sound.”¹⁵ What we have here is by no means a spontaneous, erroneous quotation from memory, but rather a deliberate grappling with the source text and its adaptation with regard to the pictorial statement. Twombly’s appropriation of what he has read is also substantiated by the author’s manner of writing the source texts on notepads before transcribing them onto the artwork.¹⁶

TWOMBLY’S TEXTUAL CITATIONS

I have provided an overview of the current results of my examination of Cy Twombly’s quotations of literary texts in a table (tab. 1).¹⁷ It illustrates the first use of a literary source (the vertical column on the left) and the frequency with which the quotations were used (the horizontal row at the bottom). Of the 56 sources noted, over a third—from 20 authors—had hitherto gone unidentified. The most comprehensive information came from the list by Nicholas Cullinan: “Twombly has sought inspiration

15 The example reveals the importance of context to the selection of quotations, which heightens the poetological self-reflection here all the more.—Cf. Alexander Schlutz’s comments under the title “Ursprüngliche Frische” online at: <http://parapluie.de/archiv/uebertragungen/twombly/> [Mai 11, 2013].

16 Cf. examples in Dean 2012 and Armin Zweite’s essay in this volume, as well as the illustrations there, pp. 366–368, ills. 10–13.—On the subject of “quotation,” cf. the *Morphomata* volume by Martin Roussel (ed.): *Kreativität des Findens. Figurationen des Zitats*. Munich 2012.

17 Status as of June 2013; the x-axis shows the given year of a quotation, the y-axis gives the source.—That “Cy Twombly” is represented with 112 references indicates that in this section, inscriptions were counted that—possibly—come from Twombly himself; they may, however, include quotations that have yet to be attributed (cf., for example, HB V 2–3, 5–6).—In my essay on Twombly’s *Quattro Stagioni* painting (1991–1995), I briefly present the most important stages of development in Twombly’s approach to quotation and a few of his image-text relations (in addition, at the end of the text, there is a transcription of inscriptions on the eight season pictures): Greub 2013a (status as of winter 2011/2012, respectively).

from and paid homage to a list of poets that is both sustained and legion: Archilochus, Catullus, Cavafy, Dickinson, Eliot, Homer, Keats, Olson, Ovid, Pessoa, Pope, Pound, Rilke, Sappho, Seferis, Shelley, Spenser, Valéry and Virgil are only a few of those who have appeared (many more than once) in Twombly's work."¹⁸ Indeed, Twombly's most frequently cited sources for poetic fragments include Rilke (30 times), followed by Sappho (20), Keats (15), Seferis and Spenser (13), and Mallarmé (9). The frequency of citations also varies, however, in terms of concentration: As the table's x-axis shows, for example, the use of Spenser is limited to the years 1976 and 1977, during which Twombly completed two annual calendars with quotations from him¹⁹, whereas the artist "stayed true" to Sappho for 44 years (from 1960 to 2004), Rilke for 33 years (1975–2008)²⁰, and Keats for 24 years (1960–1984). But Keats—as the tabular overview also illustrates—does not belong amongst the "long-term quotation sources" in the way that Sappho and Rilke do, because the majority of Keats inscriptions occur in 1960. In comparison, there are sources that Twombly only made use of once or twice, such as Verlaine²¹ or Praxilla²² in 1960. The latter provides a sterling example of how Twombly was equally disposed to using both renowned and lesser known authors—indeed, this single, three-line fragment of poetry by Praxilla, a mid-fifth century poet from Sicily, is all that remains of her work.

In general, the quotations communicate a very particular mood that Twombly is bringing to the context of the drawn or painted image, or to the sculpture at hand. Sometimes, there are relatively direct correspondences²³,

18 Dulwich 2011, 123; from this comprehensive list, I was only unable to identify Olson, Pound and Valéry (so far) as authors quoted by Twombly; Homer, Ovid and Virgil are quoted from secondary sources.

19 Cf. YL VII, 5 and 6, one of which was published as: Calendar 1985.

20 In the event that both drawings *Untitled*, Rome, 1961 (HB Z 42 and 43) present Rilke quotations (from his 1907 poem *Grabmal eines jungen Mädchens* in the translation by Jessie Lemont, cf.: *Poems. Rainer Maria Rilke*. New York 1918 [reprint], 42), Twombly's "obsession" would be with Rilke (cf. *Untitled*, Bassano in Teverina, 1985; HB IV 28, which bears the inscription "to Rilke (with Obsession)") already apparent in 1961, which would require a redefinition of Twombly's approach to quoting Rilke.

21 *Untitled (to Verlaine)*, Rome, 1960 (NDR Z II 178).

22 *Untitled (at Sea)*, Nov. 23, 1960 (NDR Z II 259).

23 E.g., when Twombly juxtaposes a crimson spot and a Sappho poem with the lines "only a purple stain / remains on the ground," as done first in the drawing *Untitled*, New York, 1965 (HB Z 51).

TAB. 1: CY TWOMBLY'S QUOTATIONS OF LITERARY TEXTS

FIRST USE OF QUOTA- TION (YEAR)	SOURCE	DATE	TOTAL	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961
1953	Twombly (?)		112	2		2		3	4	15	15	1
1959	Mallarmé	1866/1896	9							4	3	±
1960	Robert Graves	1955	5								3	
	Sappho	c. 600 B.C.	20								6	
	Verlaine	1866	1								1	
	Keats	1817/1819	15								13	1
	Pindar	c. 470 B.C.	3								3	
	Praxilla	c. 450 B.C.	1								1	
1961	Anacreon	c. 525 B.C.	1									1
1962	Shelley	1820/1821	3									
1963	Gibbon	1776	4									
	Pausanias	c. 160/170	1									
1965	Lorca	1926	1									
1967	Neruda	1934	1									
1973	Virgil	37–29 B.C.	3									
1975	Rilke	1900–1925	30									2 (?)
	Bion	c. 100 B.C.	4									
1976	Spenser	1579/1596	13									
	Theocritus	c. 270 B.C.	5									
	Marvell	1681	1									
1978	Pope (Homer)	1715–1720	1									
1979	Hadrian	138	1									
1980	Al-Ahnaf	c. 790/800	1									
1985	Leopardi	c. 1820	1									
	Rumi	c. 1260	2									
1986	Al-Ma'arri	c. 1040	1									
1989	Archilochus	c. 650 B.C.	4									
	Philip Whalen	1959	2									
	L. Julius Vestinus	c. 120/130	2									
1990	W. Stevens	1942	1									
	J.C. Ransom	1938	3									
	Sumerian city names	c. 2000 B.C.	2									
1991	Cavafy	1895/1901	2									
	Seferis	1931/1966	13									
	Catullus	56 B.C.	2									
1992	Beaudelaire	1862	2									
	Pessoa	1911–1916	5									
	Saint-Simon	c. 1750	1									
	Ivan Albright	1931–41	1									
2000	Patricia Waters	1996 (2006)	2									
	Alcman	c. 620 B.C.	1									
	Anne Sexton	1962	2									
	Buddhist Mantra	–	1									
2003	Stendhal	1822	1									
	Faiz Ahmed Faiz	um 1950/60	1									
2007	Shiki	c. 1890	1									
	Issa	c. 1810	1									
	Buson	c. 1760	1									
	Bashō	c. 1670	2									
	Kikaku	c. 1690	3									
	Taigi	c. 1760	1									
	Bachmann	1953/1956	2									
	Eliot	1922/1942	3									
	Dickinson	1862/1877	2									
	Plotinus	after 254	1									
	W.H. Gass	1999	1									
	Quotations per year		306	2		2		3	4	19	45	6

[illegible]

FIRST USE OF QUOTA- TION (YEAR)	SOURCE	DATE	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
1953	Twombly (?)						1		1		3	2
1959	Mallarmé	1866/1896										
1960	Robert Graves	1955										
	Sappho	c. 600 B.C.										
	Verlaine	1866										
	Keats	1817/1819				1						
	Pindar	c. 470 B.C.										
	Praxilla	c. 450 B.C.										
1961	Anacreon	c. 525 B.C.										
1962	Shelley	1820/1821										
1963	Gibbon	1776										
	Pausanias	c. 160/170										
1965	Lorca	1926										
1967	Neruda	1934										
1973	Virgil	37–29 B.C.										
1975	Rilke	1900–1925				1	2		‡	3		
	Bion	c. 100 B.C.									2	
1976	Spenser	1579/1596										
	Theocritus	c. 270 B.C.										
	Marvell	1681										
1978	Pope (Homer)	1715–1720										
1979	Hadrian	138										
1980	Al-Ahnaf	c. 790/800										
1985	Leopardi	c. 1820					1					
	Rumi	c. 1260					2					
1986	Al-Ma'arri	c. 1040						1				
1989	Archilochus	c. 650 B.C.									1	
	Philip Whalen	1959									2	
	L. Julius Vestinus	c. 120/130									2	
1990	W. Stevens	1942										1
	J.C. Ransom	1938										2/1*
	Sumerian city names	c. 2000 B.C.									2	
1991	Cavafy	1895/1901										
	Seferis	1931/1966										
	Catullus	56 B.C.										
1992	Beaudelaire	1862										
	Pessoa	1911–1916										
	Saint-Simon	c. 1750										
	Ivan Albright	1931–41										
2000	Patricia Waters	1996 (2006)										
	Alcman	c. 620 B.C.										
	Anne Sexton	1962										
	Buddhist Mantra	–										
2003	Stendhal	1822										
	Faiz Ahmed Faiz	c. 1950/60										
2007	Shiki	c. 1890										
	Issa	c. 1810										
	Buson	c. 1760										
	Bashō	c. 1670										
	Kikaku	c. 1690										
	Taigi	c. 1760										
	Bachmann	1953/1956										
	Eliot	1922/1942										
	Dickinson	1862/1877										
	Plotinus	after 254										
	W.H. Gass	1999										
	Quotations per year					2	6	1	2	3	10	8

[‡ = Quotations painted over or partially removed]

[* = notepad]

but from time to time, it is difficult to bring the layers of statements into agreement. In any case, literature exists as an autonomous medium, with its own laws, alongside that which is painted. Cy Twombly himself once said that he “never really separated painting and literature because I’ve always used reference.”²⁴ In that sense, Twombly’s quotations can be understood as a pun for doubled references, both as reverence for the selected text as well as a reference that allows the picture’s audience to negate the borders between literature and image, between what is written and what is painted. As Cy Twombly said to Dodie Kazanjian in 1994: “I look at a lot of artists. [...] I’m inspired by—I suppose I shouldn’t say ‘inspired,’ but it’s not really influenced. I am inspired. Art comes from art.”²⁵ And—picking up on the idea of influence—he told Edmund White: “‘Influence’ is not a dirty word. I’m influenced by everything I see—a painting but also a rush of sky.”²⁶ When someone doesn’t “get” a work by Twombly, then it is precisely—as the artist put it in 1957 in his sole theoretical text—“a lack of reference or experience”²⁷ that is responsible for this.

NEW DISCOVERIES

Among the newly discovered literary “references” in Twombly’s works, there are on the one hand clarifications and on the other, actual new discoveries. Clarifications are possible when it comes to quotations that were already assigned. Thus, the painting *Narcissus*, from 1960 (HB I 151; cf. p. 418, ill. 3), contains an abundance of inscriptions on Narcissus²⁸, all of which, superficially, seem to have been taken by Twombly from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*:

²⁴ London 2008, 45.

²⁵ Kazanjian 1994.

²⁶ White 1994, 106.

²⁷ Berlin 1994, 29.

²⁸ See the essay by Mary Jacobus in this volume.

I

II

Cy Twombly (Roma)
[?] July Ist MCMXXXXXX

Reflection I Reflection II

Narcissus

Blue Nymph –

(Leiriope

Echo –

A meinius –

~~A~~

[?]:

N. Alas ~~N~~

E. Alas !

N(Ah, youth loved in VAIN

FAREWEL!)

Reflection –

EchoNBX N M

Suicide

(ARMINIUS)

~~Echo~~

NARCISSUS

Reflection I

Ah youth loved in VAIN,

FAREWELL!

detail

Echo

Echo × Echo

Echo

Actually, the source material Twombly used was not Ovid but rather Robert Graves' book *The Greek Myths*, first published in 1955, a well-known handbook on Greek mythology. From it, the artist not only found the manner of writing names such as "blue Nymph Leiriope," "Ameinius," or concepts such as "reflection," but this is where he also located entire texts that he quoted.²⁹ A passage from Graves' book (the sections Twombly used are underlined) serves as an example:

²⁹ Graves 1981, vol. 1, 286–287.

e. Echo, although she had not forgiven Narcissus, grieved with him; she sympathetically echoed ‘Alas! Alas!’ as he plunged a dagger in his breast, and also the final ‘Ah, youth, beloved in vain, farewell!’ as he expired.³⁰

The case is similar with Edward Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* from 1776, a book Twombly consulted for his series *Nine Discourses on Commodus* (Rome, 1963; HB II 156; cf. p. 230, ill. 1.1–9). As the examples from Graves and Gibbon show, at least in these two cases (and possibly also with Pausanias³¹ and Saint-Simon³²), a well-known academic source for a lay audience served as the foundation for Twombly’s quotations rather than an actual study of the sources.³³

One side of Twombly hitherto unknown in the literature about him can for the first time be presented with quotations from Anacreon³⁴, Neruda³⁵, Bion of Smyrna³⁶, L. Julius Vestinus, Philip Whalen, Anne Sexton³⁷ and especially with the Arab poets Abbas ibn Al-Ahnaf, Abū l-‘Alā’ al-Ma’arrī, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, the Japanese Haiku poets Shiki, Issa, Buson, and Taigi as well as the philosopher Plotinus and the writer (and former professor of philosophy) William H. Gass. While Plotinus emerges as the only philosopher in the series of quotations³⁸, the quote

30 Ibid., 287–288.

31 For part IV of *Commodus* series and *Muses*, Bassano, May 1979 (YL VII 43); Paus. 9.29.2.

32 For the noble house of D’O in *Madame d’O*, Jupiter Island, 1992 (NDR S I 130), cf. Greub 2014a. — Cf. Stefan Priwitzter’s essay in this volume regarding this “painting in nine parts.”

33 This was also determined by Yvon Lambert for a Virgil quotation in both *Idilion* drawings from 1976 (YL VI 175–176, the evidence on 162).

34 In a drawing done on Mykonos, *Delian Ode* No. 55 from 1961, cf. Bonn 1987, 66.

35 From Pablo Neruda’s *Las Furias y Las Penas*, quoted by Twombly in the print *Sketches E* from 1967/1974 (“a rain of kisses on your green veins”; HB G 16).

36 As such, Bion isn’t a new discovery, just the poetry quotation further down (cf. YL VI 201a, 183 and beforehand 174, Lambert provides the author, poem, translation and a transcription of the lines: “I mourn for ADONIS: fair Adonis is Dead”).

37 In *Untitled* (Lexington, 2000; HB V 9), Twombly quotes from Sexton’s Icarus poem, *To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Triumph*, also on a notepad (cf. Dean 2011, 25 below). — For the general advice on quotation, my thanks go to Julie Sylvester in: *Cy Twombly. Last Paintings* (Catalog Gagosian Gallery New York 2012). New York 2012, 41 and 43, fn. 3.

38 On a notepad photographed by Tacita Dean, cf. Dean 2011, 24 above.

from Gass's 1999 book on Rilke, *Reading Rilke: Reflections on the Problems of Translation*—from which Twombly took the verse “the soul / We once / had”³⁹—shows that the artist did not first start to deal with non-lyrical works and texts of literary theory in the early 1990s, as was previously assumed.⁴⁰ (In 1990, Twombly had quoted from John Crowe Ransom's *The World's Body* from 1938 [“the Image cannot be dispossessed / of a Primordial freshness / which Ideas can never / claim”]⁴¹ and in 1994, he quoted from Edmund Keeley's correspondence with Giorgos Seferis [“to separate the light from the silence / And Light from the Calm”⁴²]).

The quotations from the two Arab poets, Al-Ahnaf (750–809) (“WHEN I VISIT YOU AND THE MOON / ISN'T AROUND TO SHOW ME THE WAY / COMETS OF LONGING SET MY HEART / SO MUCH ABLAZE, THE EARTH IS LIT / BY THE HOLOCAUST UNDER MY RIBS”)⁴³ and al-Ma'arrī (973–1057) (“Tread lightly, / for a thousand / hearts unseen Might / now be beating / in this misty / green”; ill. 2)⁴⁴ demonstrate Twombly's orientation to the Middle East since 1980⁴⁵; his interest in the Far East, starting in 2000, is revealed in the quotations from Pakistani poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911–1984) (“Today if the breath of Breeze / wants to scatter / Petals in the garden / of memory / why shouldn't it?”; ill. 3.1–3.2)⁴⁶ as well as of the Japanese poets Shiki, Issa, Bashō, Buson, Kikaku, and Taigi.⁴⁷

39 Also only written on a notepad (Dean 2011, 43 above); Gass 1999, 186.

40 In Tacita Dean's film *Edmund Parker*, Twombly reads in a single shot in *Posthumous Keats: A Personal Biography* from Stanley Plumly from 2008 (cf. the film still in: Vienna 2011, 246, top illustration).

41 Cf. Berlin 1994, 57 ill. 46, 58 and 71, fn. 182.

42 Christian Klemm: *Material—Modell—Skulptur. Vom Aufheben der Dinge in die Vorstellung*. In: Basel 2000, 180, fn. 2.

43 *Longing of Fire*, part IV of *V Day Wait at Jiayuguan*, 1980 (YL VII 71d; original written in majuscule).

44 *Paesaggio*, Bassano in Teverina, 1986 (HB IV 39).

45 In 1973 Twombly took a winter trip to India; in 1980 he traveled to Russia, central Asia, and Afghanistan in the fall; in 1983 he went to Yemen; in 1989 he spent Christmas in Istanbul and in May 1999 went to Iran, where he spent some time in Isfahan, cf. NDR Z II, 269–272; see the essay by Nicola Del Roscio in this volume and Greub 2016a.

46 In the sculpture *Untitled*, Lexington, 2003 (Munich 2006, 23).

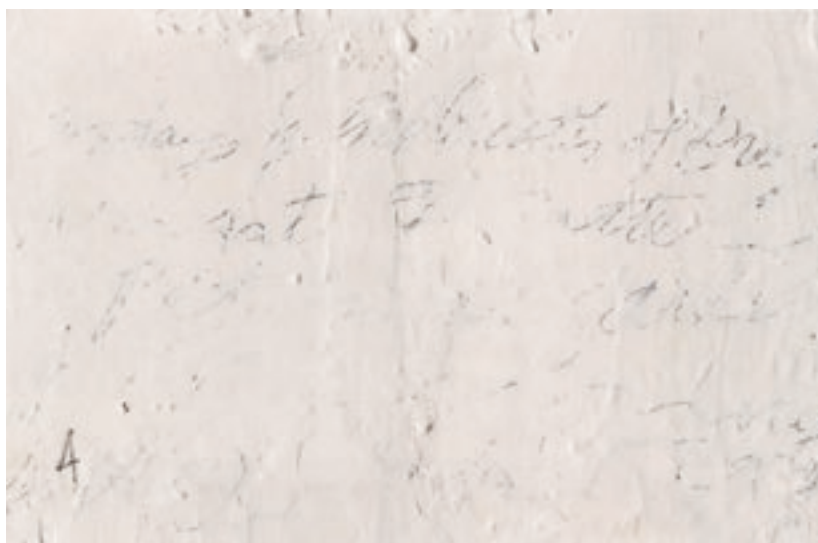
47 In October 1995, Twombly traveled to Japan to accept the *Praemium Imperiale* (the “Nobel prize for the arts” funded by Japan's imperial family).—In the painting *Untitled*, Gaeta, 2007 (HB V 55; cf. p. 306, ill. 1 and Yoshinobu Hakutani's



2 Cy Twombly: *Paesaggio*, Bassano in Teverina, 1986, oil paint, acrylic on wooden panel, 175.5 × 128.3 cm, Private Collection



3.1 Cy Twombly: *Untitled*, Lexington, 2003, wood, nails, plaster, resin paint in white and bright ocher, an imprint gleams on orange, traces of acrylic in neon yellow and neon pink, pencil, 43×66×29 cm, Collection Cy Twombly Foundation



3.2 Detail from 3.1, Cy Twombly: *Untitled*, 2003, Collection Cy Twombly Foundation, top view

The aforementioned Asian poets from 1000 A.D. or earlier, as well as the modern Pakistani writer, indicate the geographical and temporal breadth of quotations used by Cy Twombly: They range from the USA (with an indicated predilection for Southern writers) to Europe and onwards to Japan; from Sumerian and Akkadian city names and a Buddhist mantra up to the young American poet Patricia Waters, or the Rilke book by W.H. Grass—that is, from about 3,000 BC to the late 1990s, a span of about 5,000 years.⁴⁸ Priority is given to antiquity, English Romanticism, and the time of and preceding the first third of the twentieth century. The 56 sources run right through all the artist's periods of creativity and can easily be attributed to the stylistic development of Twombly's art. After Mallarmé, one finds a feverish, rash phase of interest in Sappho, Keats, and, briefly, Pindar; starting in 1973, there are the "pastoral" poets—Virgil, Bion, Spenser, Theocritus, and Marvel, all signifying the marked change in Twombly's artistic medium of expression from pencil to paintbrush.⁴⁹ The aforementioned turn to theoretical texts (John Crowe Ransom and Baudelaire) becomes apparent starting in 1990, and a Greek "flirtation" with the lyrics of Constantine Cavafy⁵⁰ and above all the late poetry of Giorgos Seferis begins in 1991. In 1992 and 2002, Twombly became fascinated by the poems of Fernando Pessoa, and in 2007, he took an interest in Japanese Haiku—but not without turning again to more recent poets: Ingeborg Bachmann, T.S. Eliot, and Emily Dickinson.⁵¹ All in all, the absence of a few prominent names in the inscribed quotations is striking: no

essay in this volume) Haikus by the first five poets are found (in the critical literature, the first four haikus were always attributed to Bashō and the final one to Kikaku, e.g. HB V, fn. 43, 31 and Chicago 2009, 30–31); Taigi is quoted together with Bashō in *Untitled*, Gaeta, 2007 (HB V 58).

48 W.H. Gass' *Reading Rilke: Reflections on the Problems of Translation* was published in 1999. 2006—a more recent date—is given as the publication year of Patricia Waters' poetry volume *The Ordinary Sublime* (in which Twombly is thanked by name, *ibid.*, xii), but the poems were already published together with works by Twombly in gallery catalog: *Now is the Drinking* appeared in 1996, for example.—Regarding both of the *Thicket* sculptures from 1990 or 1991 (the former was revised in 1999; Del Roscio 1997, 109 and 110), cf. Petr Charvát's essay in this volume.

49 Cf. Gottfried Boehm's essay in this volume.

50 Cf. Greub 2013b.

51 Cf. Armin Zweite's essay in this volume.—Udo Brandhorst gave Twombly two bilingual editions of poetry by Bachmann and Rilke in which Twombly found the rose poems (personal discussion with Dr. Nina Schleif from Museum Brandhorst in Cologne, June 13, 2012 and correspondence from May 21, 2013).

Shakespeare or Goethe⁵²; no Hölderlin, but Rilke instead; no John Milton or Ralph Waldo Emerson, but rather Andrew Marvell and Patricia Waters. One gets the impression that Twombly avoided the absolute “classics” and instead preferred the “uncomfortable greats” in the literary canon—alongside lesser known names placed on absolutely equal footing.

Certainly, one cannot completely dismiss Kirk Varnedoe's warning, “The game of trying to ‘read’ these pictures is pointless, reductive, and ultimately inconclusive, and yet also a challenge that is hard to resist”⁵³; precisely in its ambivalence, however, it demonstrates the fascination induced by Twombly's inscriptions. Martina Dobbe also correctly writes: “The problem of a text-oriented, iconographic interpretation [...] cannot be solved by completely denying iconographic connections. In the end, the deciding factor should always be based on how the visual perception accords with potential textual references.”⁵⁴ In any case, depending on the degree of legibility and the connection to the entire picture, this “challenge” shouldn't be too easily resisted—especially in light of Twombly's desire “to revalorize poetry now” and his corresponding thought that “it would be lovely to have something with text”; this would also signify a “reductive” closing of one's mind to a fundamental constituent of Twombly's art. Moreover, this would result in the associated sources offered in the form of inscriptions, clearly used by Twombly as a motivation for creation and offered to the pictures' audiences by the artist himself, remaining unutilized. While it is true that the quotations are hard to read at first, to deduce—as James Rondeau does—that the use of quotation inscriptions essentially constitutes “a skillful strategy for impeding comprehension”⁵⁵ seems like a lopsided and overly abbreviated way of viewing the complexity with which literary references are used in Cy Twombly's oeuvre.

52 “Only” in the title and/or the titular inscriptions in a few works: YL VI 27–31 (*Venus and Adonis*, 1978); HB IV 14–15 (*Goethe in Italy (Scene I and II)*, 1978).—Cf. Lisa Hopkins' essay in this volume on the Christopher Marlowe quotation in the title of a painting from 1985.

53 Berlin 1994, fn. 95.

54 Dobbe 1999, fn. 522, in which the author herself quotes inscriptions (293, 294, 298).

55 Chicago 2009, 17; The quotation in its entirety reads: “The indefinable significations found throughout Twombly's work—in the form of countless literary, poetic, and historic allusions—, divert attention from their author. In this light, the use of linguistic elements is a skillful strategy for impeding comprehension: The artist shunts his temporal frame of reference while fixing it all the more clearly in spatial respects.”

IMAGE-TEXT RELATIONS

This is not the place for a detailed exploration of the complexity of the image-text relations in Twombly's works. A cursory synopsis must instead suffice. If one surveys the American's entire oeuvre, one is confronted with utterly different variants of the connection between text and image. Here, we will only look at examples that can be described as "extreme cases." In what is reputed to be the simplest form of image-text relation, the notation written into a work serves an apparently direct association insofar as the lettering "annotates" the pictorial form adjacent to it. Proximity is the important feature here, because the inscription is placed next to the corresponding pictorial symbol and, as a result, is referential in nature (as is the case, for example, in the provision of heroes' names in *Fifty Days at Iliam* [HB IV 13; cf. p. 164, ill. 10 and p. 174, ill. 14] alongside the phallic "chariots").⁵⁶ Another case of image-text relations comes in the form of giant letters on a canvas, a painted "script" that can be read as lettering but also, at the same time, as an "image" in the sense of an external visual reference (as is the case in Twombly's late *Notes from Salalah* [HB V 59–61], in which the brushstrokes seem to suggest letters but without actually forming words, while at the same time they could also be interpreted as waves). While the "literal" interpretation is suggested by the "pseudo-writing"⁵⁷—as Twombly himself called it—, the "pictorial" relies on the colors and the overall composition of the painting. The last two contrary possibilities of the image-text relation in Twombly's work are, on the one hand, the one with the largest possible identity between inscription and pictorial figuration (as in the drawing *Untitled* from 1965 [HB Z 51], in which a crimson spot evokes the "purple stain" quotation from Sappho's poem about hyacinths⁵⁸), and, on the other hand, the largest possible difference between inscription and pictorial form, especially in those instances where the text integrated into the pictorial form emerges as a purported explanation (for example, in the *Cnidian Venus* painting [HB III 7–10, 23; cf. pp. 190–193, ill. 1–4], where the lettering "CNIDIAN V." is set beneath an empty trapezoidal form)⁵⁹.

⁵⁶ Cf. the contribution of Joachim Latacz to this volume.

⁵⁷ London 2008, 53.

⁵⁸ Cf. fn. 23.

⁵⁹ Compare Dietrich Boschung's contribution to this volume.

At times, the cited texts not only stand in tense relation to the “rest” of the drawn and/or painted work but often also to each other. Similar to the image-text relation, this relationship can also be most aptly described as a cross-fertilization or mutual charging. A good example for this as well as for the broad temporal and geographical range of Twombly's combined quotations is the *Petals of Fire* painting from August 1989 (HB IV 54; ill. 4), whose inscriptions can first be decoded and attributed here⁶⁰:

CT CT Bassanno in Aug 89

Bassano in Teverina 18 Aug 89

As long as you have b[rea]th b[reath] your last

Red roses black edged

Into my mouth, b[reathe] your soul in my heart

Petals

till I've sipped the sweetness of your poison

to the deep, [drunk] the lees of your love

Sacrificial juices, as dark purple

Awake a moment

Aas the trickling flux-drop of the cuttle fish

Mind dreams again

Red

never flow over me

Roses black_edged

The first verse (“as long as you have breath...”) borrows lines from Bion's bucolic poem *Lament for Adonis* from ca. 100 BCE⁶¹; the second quotation below it comes from L. Julius Vestinus, a Greek lexicographer and the privy secretary to Emperor Hadrian who dedicated a poem to the Roman

60 A second painting from August 1989, created at the same time, quotes the same sources in a slightly different arrangement (HB IV 53).

61 The Bion quotation in Holden 1974, 168, reads: “Awake, Adonis, just one brief moment, / for a kiss, last kiss, a kiss to live / as long as you have breath; breathe your last / into my mouth, breathe your soul into my heart, / till I've sipped the sweetness of your poison / to the dregs, drunk the lees of your love.”—The start of the verse, omitted by Twombly, “Awake” links this quotation to Whalen's “Haiku,” which starts with the same word: “Awake a moment / Mind dreams again / Red roses black-edged petals.”



4 Cy Twombly: *Petals of Fire*, Bassano in Teverina, August 8, 1989, acrylic, oil paint (paint stick), lead pencil, colored pencil, staples on paper, 144 × 128 cm, Collection Cy Twombly Foundation

ruler on an altar—a poem which itself had the form of an altar.⁶² Between and, in part, above the black painted lines of this “object poem” (“Sacrificial juices...”) from ca. 120/130 CE, as well as the lines from Bion standing above them (both verse fragments come from the same English 1974 anthology, Anthony Holden’s *Greek Pastoral Poetry*), Twombly placed—in fiery red script (here, for clarification, in cursive)—a haiku-style poem from 1959 by Philip Whalen, a U.S. Beat poet. The red color of the latter and the black of the two antique poetry quotations correspond to the red-black “blotches” in the picture that seem to hover between the two antique quotations like flower petals (“petals of fire,” as the painting’s title puts it). The brief moments between life and death (Bion), virginity and sacrifice (Vestinus), dream and consciousness (Whalen), ascent and descent (the flake-like traces of paint), the colors red (“roses,” “mouth”) and black (“black-edged”) come together into a never completely solvable emblem of the aforementioned poles of tension between (descending) sorrow and (fiery) hope.

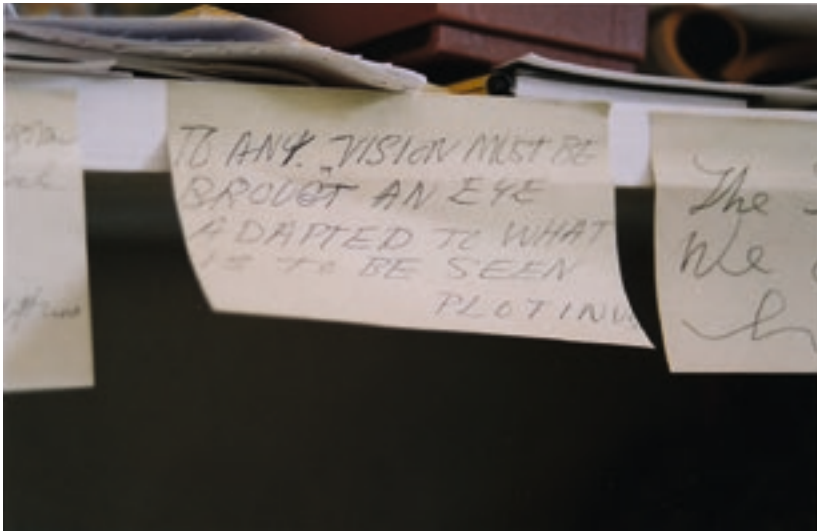
In this case, too, the combination of image and text illustrates precisely the state of affairs that Twombly himself describes as a “jump-start”—by which the artist indirectly harkens back to what he told Hans Ulrich Obrist about the necessary revaluation of poetry in our time. Responding to Nicholas Serota’s question about whether Ezra Pound and Eliot had been important to him from the start, Twombly said in 2007:

“Yeah, I read Eliot in Washington University, in Lexington. One of the little *Quartets*. And now I have a nice collection of books—a first edition of *The Waste Land*, little volumes of the first of the *Four Quartets* and I also have a facsimile of Pound’s correction of *The Waste Land* ... The next series of paintings has lines from *The Waste Land*. It’s one of the most beautiful, especially the beginning, on the seasons: ‘Summer surprised us ... / With a shower of rain; we stopped in the colonnade, / And went on in sunlight, into the Hofgarten.’

62 The Vestinus quotation reads, *ibid.*, 202 (the altar is speaking): “Sacrificial juices, as dark purple / As the trickling flux-drops of the / Cuttlefish, never flow over me.”—Holden writes *ibid.*, 227 about Vestinus: “He is known from inscription as ‘High-priest of Alexandria and all Egypt, Curator of the Museum, Keeper of the Libraries of both Greek and Roman at Rome, Supervisor of the Education of Hadrian, and Secretary to the same Emperor.’”; for more on this, cf.: *Der Neue Pauly* (DNP) from 2002, vol. 12/2, col. 134–135.

Anyway ... I need, I like emphasis ... I like something to jumpstart me—usually a place or a literary reference or an event that took place, to start me off. To give me clarity or energy.”⁶³

Just as they do for the artist, Twombly’s selected quotations provide a “jumpstart” for the viewer, something that “spurs” us—and in this sense, they also want to be read. A quote from Plotinus shows the way for tracing the complexity of the image-text relation in Twombly’s work; it designates the discerner’s state of being prepared for what is to be discerned as a prerequisite to discernment (Cy Twombly had fastened it to one of his notepads; ill. 5): “TO ANY VISION MUST BE / BROUGHT AN EYE / ADAPTED TO WHAT / IS TO BE SEEN.”⁶⁴



5 Photography by Tacita Dean, from ‘GAETA: a photo essay’, 2008. Published in ‘Cy Twombly, States of Mind’, MUMOK, Vienna, 2009. Image courtesy the artist; Frith Street Gallery, London and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York/Paris

⁶³ London 2008, 50.—Regarding the aforementioned painting with the “Hofgarten” quotation, cf. the comment *ibid.*, fn. 7, 231.

⁶⁴ Plotinus, *Ennead* 1:6 in *The Heart of Plotinus: The Essential Enneads*, ed. Algis Uždavinys, Bloomington: World Wisdom 2009, 76.

ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

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5 From 'GAETA: a photo essay', 2008. Published in 'Cy Twombly, States of Mind', MUMOK, Vienna, 2009. Image courtesy the artist; Frith Street Gallery, London and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York/Paris.



1 Cy Twombly: *Untitled*, Rome, 1960, lead pencil, oil-based house paint, oil paint on canvas, 100 × 150.5 cm, Collection Cy Twombly Foundation

MARY JACOBUS

TWOMBLY'S NARCISSUS: OVID'S ART, RILKE'S MIRROR

References to the Narcissus story in Cy Twombly's work surface at two main periods—during 1960, in paintings that allude to Ovid's narrative in Book III of the *Metamorphoses*, and later, in drawings made during the mid-1970s, when he returned to the theme prompted by his reading of Rilke's poetry. That the approaches in these paintings and drawings are quite distinct suggests the ways in which Twombly could be said to 'think' both through, and in, poetry. The Ovidian narrative is concerned above all with aesthetic transformation and with the making of art. By contrast, Rilke's 'Narziss' poems have to do with the dissolution of the self into the art-work—with loss and self-loss, and ultimately with poetry as a mode of cognition as well as (self-)reflection.

The name 'Narcissus' functions as an allusion to the shifting aesthetic and affective resonances taken on by the myth in Twombly's work between 1960 and 1975. Even the word 'allusion' (the title Twombly gave to a cluster of drawings belonging to 1975 that link Narcissus, Orpheus, and Dionysus) itself alludes to a warning remark made by Rilke apropos of elucidating his *Sonnets to Orpheus*: 'All "allusion" I'm convinced would be contradictory to the indescribable "being there" of the poem'¹. Twombly's paintings and drawings have their own indescribable way of 'being there'. But—like Rilke's poems—they also have meanings that are specific to themselves and to the artist, meanings that can be elucidated. Twombly's allusions to Narcissus open onto the entire field of visual and verbal (self-)representation and the tensions they set in play: images and words, looking and language, recognition and understanding.

1 See Rilke: *Sonnets to Orpheus*, trans. M.B. Herter Norton. New York 1962, 10.



2 Cy Twombly: *Narcissus*, Rome, 1960, lead pencil, oil-based house paint, oil paint, wax crayon on canvas, 100 × 150 cm, Private Collection

I. OVID'S ART

Twombly, I want to argue, initially approached the Ovidian story with attention both to its narrative detail and to its emphasis on aesthetics. His most elaborate visual representations of the Narcissus story belong to the early 1960s, when his engagement with Ovidian themes first announces itself.² Three paintings made in Rome spell out Twombly's relation to the Ovidian narrative in diagrammatic but startlingly visceral detail. *Untitled* (Rome, 1960; ill. 1) uses the motif of box-like, story-board 'Reflections' (numbered 1–6)—mirrors, paintings, dreams, or memories—containing scribbles, smears of paint, pools or pubic hair, and shaded buttocks (male or female). Beneath is a diagram of the chiasmic relations between 'Amore' and 'Psyche', perhaps alluding to Twombly's preoccupation of the same year in his *Ode to Psyche* (Ischia, 1960).

The companion painting, *Narcissus* (Rome, 1960; ill. 2) contains a similarly diagrammatic representation, its box-like images ('Reflection I–VI') framing smears of erotic pink and seminal cream; rows of wave-like lines recall *Poems to the Sea* (1959)—another series connected with sex, birth, and poetry. A numbered step-diagram (Twombly's ideogram for the ubiquitous 'scala' of Rome—or for mounting excitement?) leads up and right, towards the artist's signature, place, and date, along with a small framed designation: 'A Narcissist'. Above it, another cartouche contains the name 'Narcissus' and a creamy scribble with a pink centre that resembles not so much the clear, grass-edged pool and shady coppice of Ovid's narrative as an unmistakable (if ambiguous) pubic and genital landscape. Specularity and sexuality are linked to the same problematic: is loving a matter of identification with sameness, or is there room for sexual difference? Does everything the artist sees, loves, and projects onto his canvas amount only to self-reflection?

A larger painting of the same date, also titled *Narcissus* (Rome, 1960; ill. 3), gestures toward a more explicitly Ovidian narrative. Its motifs include a circle with the name 'Echo', another with a ruddy 'X' sign cancelling the (mis-spelled) word 'suicide' (*sic*) and the parenthetical name 'Arminius'. It is tempting to read this as a misspelling of the name

² For a brief discussion of Twombly's *Narcissus* paintings and drawings in relation to Poussin's treatment in *Echo and Narcissus* (1629–30), see Dulwich 2011, 33–4.



3 Cy Twombly: *Narcissus*, Rome, 1960, lead pencil, oil-based house paint, wax crayon, colored pencil on canvas, 205.5 × 298 cm, Private Collection

'Ameinias' that appears in the Beotian version of the Narcissus story. Ameinias is a boy whose love Narcissus does not reciprocate; instead, he sends him a sword which Ameinias turns against himself, cursing Narcissus as he dies.³ This cruel episode seems to be interposed between Echo and Narcissus in Twombly's painting. At any rate, someone has been definitively cancelled out, and in red.

In the upper right corner, 'N.' (Narcissus) says 'Alas', while 'E.' (Echo) replies 'Alas', echoing the already echoic chorus in Ovid's narrative ('*quotiensque puer miserabilis "eheu" / dixerat, haec resonis iterabat vocibus "eheu"*'; *Met.* iii. 495–6).⁴ Other motifs include waves, the 'scala' again, a stylized graffiti-like phallic sign, and—prominently positioned—a cartouche labeled 'Narcissus' in which petals or teardrops (or even blood-drops) surround a decorative yellow flower, a pictorial shorthand for Narcissus's metamorphosis into 'a flower, its yellow centre girt with petals' ('*croceum pro corpore florem / inveniunt foliis medium cingentibus albis*'; *Met.* iii. 509–10).⁵ Below are the words 'Ah youth loved in VAIN, FAREWELL!'—the last words addressed by Narcissus to his reflection before his death ('*ultima vox solitam fuit haec spectantis in undam: / "heu frustra dilecte puer!"*' (*Met.* iii. 499–500)—, a farewell plaintively repeated by Echo.⁶ No one today could use the word 'FAREWELL!' with an entirely straight face.

Smearred and shaded motifs of mirroring and/or painting in the upper right corner ('*Reflection I*' and '*Reflection II*') add a further comment: whether heart- or buttock-shapes, the reflexive image—already situated within the picture—is doubled like artistic notations of an unresolved erotic dilemma. Across the canvas drift (left to right) petals, tears, drops of blood, or perhaps the repeated sounds of grief uttered by the naiads and dryads

3 The story is retold by Robert Graves: *Greek Myths*. London 1955, 287.

4 Ovid: *Metamorphoses*, trans. Frank Justus Miller, 2 vols., Loeb ed. London / New York 1916, i. 158–9. Twombly's library at his death contained: Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Rolfe Humphries. Indiana 1955 (1983 reprint); the reprint is too late to know whether it was the text he used in the early 1960s.—See Thierry Greub's contribution to this volume.

5 Ovid: *Metamorphoses*, trans. Miller, op. cit., i. 160–1. Graves's account emphasizes the blood that soaked the earth as Narcissus kills himself (see Graves: *Greek Myths*, op. cit., 288); in Twombly's version, the petals surrounding flower (or pool) are faintly tinged with pink, as if doubling for drops of blood.

6 Ovid: *Metamorphoses*, trans. Miller, op. cit., i. 160–1. This is close to the form of words used by Graves: *Greek Myths*, op. cit., 288: 'Ah, youth, beloved in vain, farewell!' Miller's translation reads: 'Alas, dear boy, vainly beloved!'; Humphries's 1955 translation has 'Farewell, dear boy, / Beloved in vain!'

and by Echo, transformed into poetry's emblematic laurel leaves (a playful miniature metamorphosis on the artist's part). Twombly seems to be asking whether love necessarily repeats itself, but with a difference. By analogy, is painting itself doomed to pursue an endless form of repetition in its quest to grasp the image?—especially when it includes verbal representation in the form of quotation. Can aesthetic transformation take place in art (an old debate), or does visual representation only give back a pale echo?

Twombly seems to be asking whether painting itself can 'speak' with the same eloquence as poetry; whether it is bound to follow rather than initiate. The same Latin word, '*imago*', refers both to an echo and to a reflection.⁷ Ovid's play on the relation between the two—words given back in the air, images reflected in water—emphasizes his own alternation between verbal and visual representation, and the oscillation in poetry itself between sonic effects and image-capture or ekphrasis. Ovid's stylistic use of repetition already raises issues about sameness and difference, opening a gap between word and word, and between word and image, emphasizing the coexistence of verbal and visual representation in his poetry.⁸ His narrative suggests that the narcissist only escapes the endless cycle of repetition by becoming a flower: through aesthetic transformation (myth, poetry) the art-object can 'frame' the representation of nature, rendered back to the viewer as an image entranced by its own beauty. Mirrors within mirrors.

In the Ovidian narrative, the psychical allegory of destructive self-love is based on a misunderstanding: 'He loves an unsubstantial hope and thinks that substance which is only shadow' ('*spem sine corpore amat, corpus putat esse, quod umbra est*', *Met.* iii. 417).⁹ Narcissus hangs over his reflection 'like a statue carved from Parian marble' ('*ut e Pario formatum marmore signum*', *Met.* iii. 419).¹⁰ Ovid lingers on his looks as worthy of

7 See the discussion by Elaine Fantham: *Ovid's Metamorphoses*. Oxford 2004, 45: 'It happens that one Latin word, *imago*, denotes both an echo—or aural reflection—and a reflection, which we might conceive of as a visual echo'. Fantham draws attention to Ovid's fascination with 'the fascinating situation' of Narcissus's self-reflexive image and Echo's echoic complaints.

8 See Philip Hardie: 'Introduction'. In: *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, ed. Philip Hardie. Cambridge 2002, 7: 'These repetitions translate to the verbal plane issues of visual representations. Does a verbal repetition signal identity, or does a gap open up in the space between two instances of the same word? What is the relationship between reality and representation?'

9 Ovid: *Metamorphoses*, trans. Miller, op. cit., i. 152–3.

10 Ibid., i. 154–5.

the gods Bacchus and Apollo—smooth cheeks, ivory neck, beautiful face (at once blushing and snowy white)—as he endlessly repeats his kisses and vainly attempts to clasp the neck of his beloved. Entering the narrative, Ovid chides Narcissus: ‘O fondly foolish boy, why vainly seek to clasp a fleeting image?’ (*‘credule, quid frustra simulacra fugacia captas?’*, *Met.* iii. 432).¹¹ For Ovid, the delusion of love lies in the pleasurable yet tantalizing choice of a simulacrum as love-object.

Once Narcissus recognizes that he is doomed to be his own *‘imago’*, he wastes away—ironically fulfilling Tiresias’s prophecy that he will live to a ripe old age only ‘If he ne’er know himself’ (*“si se non noverit”*, *Met.* iii. 348).¹² He does come to know himself, or at least recognizes his insoluble erotic dilemma. In another strikingly aesthetic image, the statue in Parian marble melts like wax or like hoarfrost consumed by hidden fire (*‘ut intabescere flavae / igne levi cerae matutinaeque pruinae / sole tepente solent’*, *Met.* iii. 487–9).¹³ Ovid lingers on this image of self-consumed and self-consuming passion. The aesthetic object is unable to withstand its own love, melting into liquid insubstantiality. The cries of grief that accompany Narcissus’s death (‘Alas’ and ‘Farewell’) prelude his transformation into a beautiful flower, perennially captive to the liquidity of his own reflection. What Narcissus ‘knows’ through art is his own nature.

II. RILKE’S MIRROR

Twombly’s 1975 series of *Narcissus* drawings and collages (exhibited under the collective title of *‘Allusions’*) revises the myth along lines that were suggested by his fortuitous encounter with Rilke’s 1913 *Narziss* poems.¹⁴

¹¹ Ibid., i. 154–5: ‘his locks, worthy of Bacchus, worthy of Apollo’ (*‘sidus et dignos Baccho, dignos et Apolline crines’*, *Met.* iii. 420–1). Stephen Hinds emphasizes the ways in which ‘two aspects of Ovidian visuality (thematization of viewing, and appeal to visual art) come together at the pool of Narcissus’, where the reflected image ‘becomes a different kind of *imago* as Narcissus the viewer is immobilized (and himself objectified) by the spectacle of himself as art object’; see ‘Landscape with figures: aesthetics of place in the *Metamorphoses* and its tradition’, in his *Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, op. cit., 137.

¹² Ovid: *Metamorphoses*, trans. Miller, op. cit., i. 148–9.

¹³ Ibid., i. 158–9.

¹⁴ For Twombly’s unrealized draft poster for the exhibition, ‘Cy Twombly, Allusions (Bay of Naples)’, February 1975, see YL VI 132.—See also Georg Braungart’s contribution to the present volume.

Twombly evidently had with him in his Naples hotel Herter Norton's 1942 bilingual translation of Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus*, which he also drew on at the same time for his *Orpheus* drawings. Here he would also have found in Norton's commentary an extended note on the importance for Rilke of the image of the mirror, including a reference to the angels in the second of Rilke's *Duino Elegies* ('mirrors that draw their own out-streamed / beauty into their face again').¹⁵ Twombly was in the habit of using the rectangle of the 'quadro' (the canvas) as sign for representation, reflection, or 'mirror of nature' (an idea that goes back to Alberti's picture theory). Norton's commentary goes on to cite extracts from Rilke's two *Narziss* poems—the source for a number of Twombly's quotations as well as passages he copied out on separate sheets of paper.¹⁶

One of these quotations, the words 'He loved what went forth out of him / into himself again', is inscribed on Twombly's beautiful collage, *Narcissus* (Naples, 1975; ill. 4).¹⁷ Above the line, small capitals in grey pencil spell the name, followed by the parenthetical inscription from Rilke. The viewer's eye is drawn downwards towards the large, blurred, blue letters of a double inscription, 'NARCISSUS', occupying the place of the reflection. Using the division between two sheets of paper butted against each another, like the fold in a book, Twombly seems to have in mind the 'tear-blurred lines' expressed in one of the *Narcissus* poems cited by Norton: 'What is reflected there and surely like me, / and trembles upward now in tear-blurred lines, / might perhaps come to being in some woman / inwardly'—but for Rilke (and perhaps for Twombly too) 'it was not to be reached'.¹⁸

15 Rilke: *Sonnets to Orpheus*, trans. Herter Norton, op. cit., 153.

16 One sheet, headed 'NARCISSUS', contains the following fragments from Norton's annotated edition: 'It lies open now in the indifferent / scattered water, & I may gaze on it / at length under my wreath of roses' and 'He loved what went forth out of him / into himself again'; see Rilke: *Sonnets to Orpheus*, trans. Herter Norton, op. cit., 153–4, and Cy Twombly Archive, Letter 86. My grateful acknowledgements to Nicola Del Roscio and the Cy Twombly Archive for locating these sheets.

17 Rilke: *Sonnets to Orpheus*, trans. Herter Norton, op. cit., 154; cf. Rainer Maria Rilke: *Werke: Gedichte, 1910 bis 1926*, ed. Manfred Engel / Ulrich Fülleborn, 3 vols. Frankfurt a.M. 1996), ii. 55: *Er liebte, was ihm ausging, wieder ein / und war nicht mehr im offenen Wind enthalten / ...*.

18 Rilke: *Sonnets to Orpheus*, trans. Herter Norton, op. cit., 153; cf. Rilke: *Werke*, ed. Engel/Fülleborn, op. cit., ii. 56 (*Narziss*): *'Was sich dort bildet und mir sicher gleicht / und aufwärts zittert in verweinten Zeichen, / das mochte so in einer Frau vielleicht / innen entstehn; es war nicht zu erreichen / ...'*



4 Cy Twombly: *Narcissus*, Naples, 1975, collage: (drawing paper, staples), oil paint, wax crayon, lead pencil on paper, 140 × 100 cm, Collection Cy Twombly Foundation

Rilke is perhaps alluding to his failure to find in a female figure (an Echo, so to speak) someone able to hold, consolidate, and give coherence to his own floating image.¹⁹ This anguished inability to transcend his limits leaves him confronted with the image of his own sadness, as 'it lies open now in the indifferent / scattered water' (part of the same quotation from Herter Norton's commentary).²⁰ Rilke's *Narziss* poems concern the (impossible) relation of love—a relation re-articulated in poetry, but also in the poet's vanishing into the affect of his poem as the only form of reflection available to him—that is, the reflection of his sadness and self-confinement. The aesthetic act of the poet becomes his representation of the loss of self (equivalent to Twombly's grey pencil letters and inscription) into what it tearfully contemplates in the indifferent water.

In an excerpt from his other *Narziss* poem of 1913, Rilke evokes both the beauty and fleetingness of Narcissus as he passes away like the scent of heliotrope, leaving only the faintest trace: 'From his beauty / unceasingly arose his being's nearness, / concentrated like the scent of heliotrope. / But for him was set, that he should see himself.'²¹ Rilke's Narcissus vanishes, self-enclosed, into the unending ask of self-beholding or self-seeing; he exists fully only in his poetry. Twombly's collage explores the dilemma posed by Rilke's *Narziss* poems: the name 'Narcissus' represents, on one hand, the elusiveness of the image; and on the other, its disappearance into a linguistic reflection—and the (im)possibility anything but a tenuous relation to the other, whether through text and image read together, or through text viewed as an image.

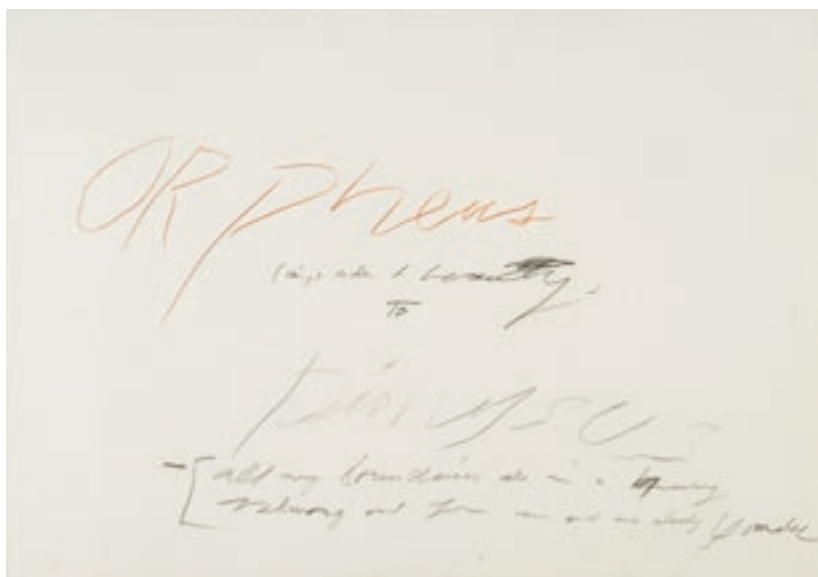
Twombly included a third quotation from Herter Norton's translated extracts from the *Narziss* poems in his Orpheus drawing, *Allusion (Bay of Napoli Part II)* (Naples, 1975): 'all my boundaries are in a hurry, / plunge out from me and are already yonder' (ill. 5).²² The quotation is

¹⁹ See, for instance, Erika M. Nelson: *Reading Rilke's Orphic Identity*. Bern 2005, 152–4.

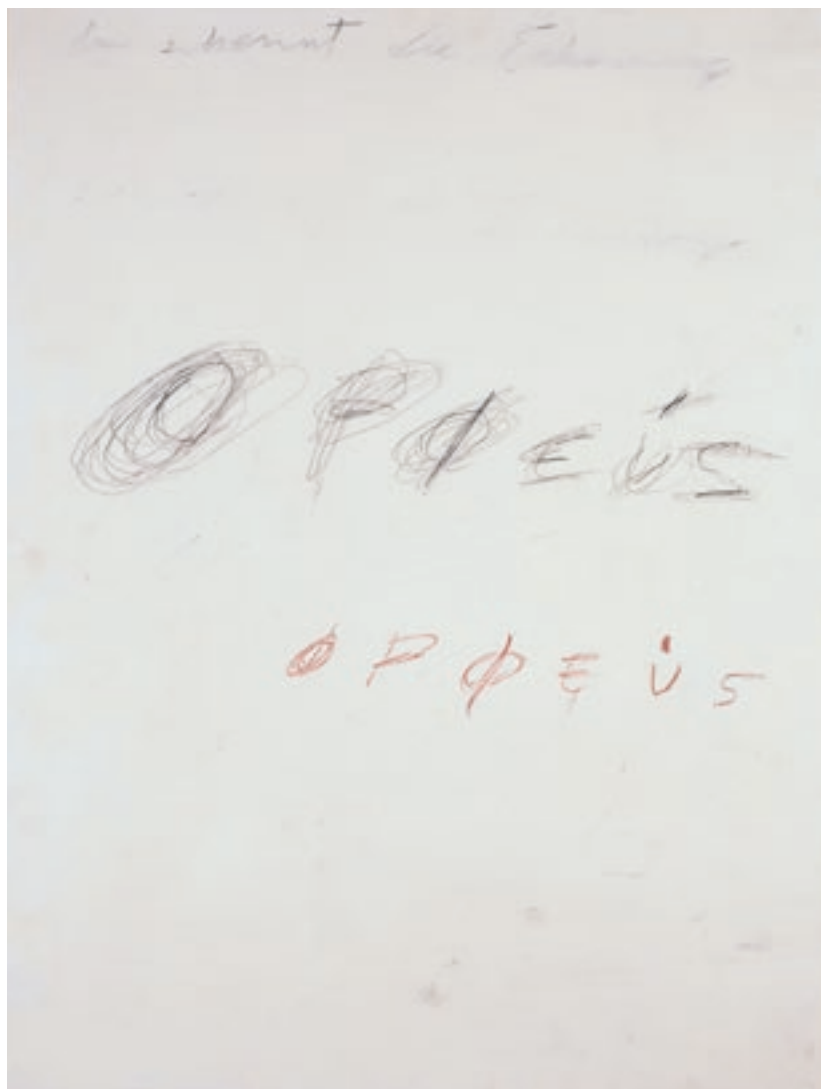
²⁰ Rilke: *Sonnets to Orpheus*, trans. Herter Norton, op. cit., 153; one of the passages Twombly copied out. Cf. 'Jetzt liegt es offen in dem teilnahmslosen / zerstreuten Wasser ...' (Rilke: *Werke*, ed. Engel/Fülleborn, op. cit., ii. 56 (*Narziss*)); see Cy Twombly Archive, Letter 86.

²¹ Rilke: *Sonnets to Orpheus*, trans. Norton, op. cit., 154. Cf. '... Von seiner Schönheit hob / sich unaufhörlich seines Wesens Nähe, / ... Ihm aber war gesetzt, daß er sich sähe.'; Rilke: *Werke*, ed. Engel/Fülleborn, op. cit., ii. 55 (*Narziss*).

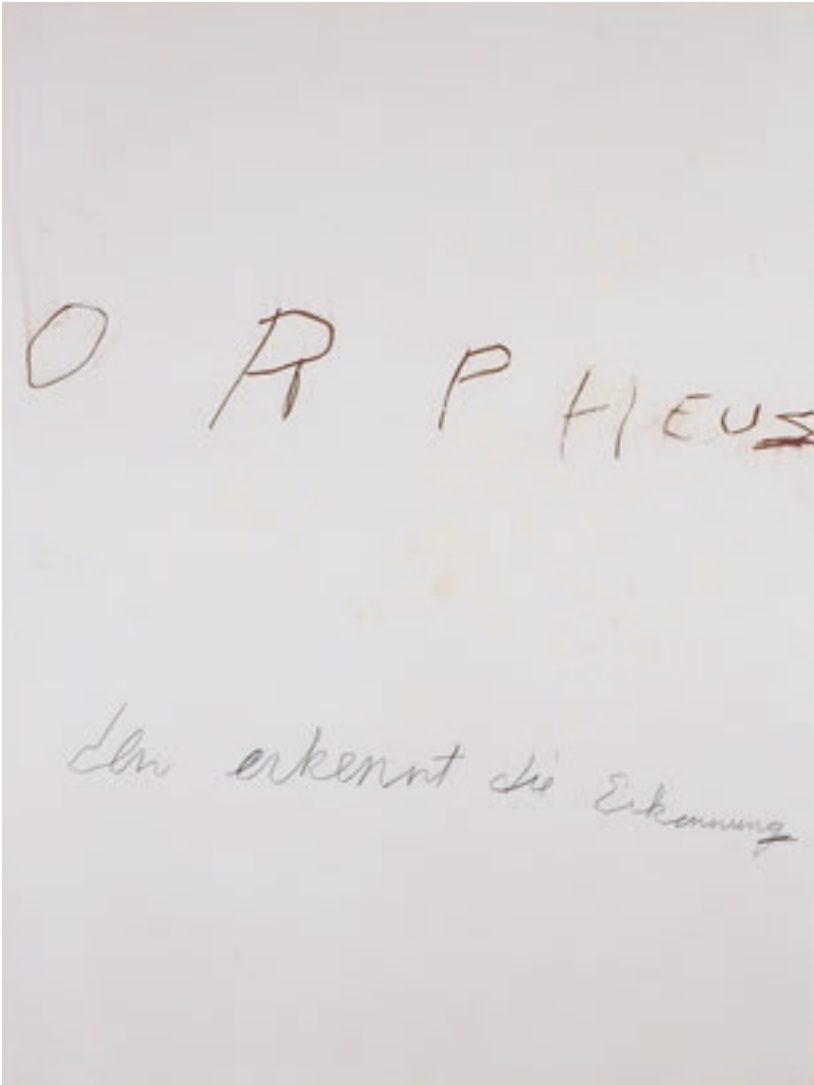
²² Rilke: *Sonnets to Orpheus*, trans. Norton, op. cit., 153. Cf. '... alle meine Grenzen haben Eile, / stürzen hinaus und sind schon dort.'; Rilke: *Werke*, ed. Engel/Fülleborn,



5 Cy Twombly: *Allusion (Bay of Napoli Part II)*, Naples, January 1975, 2 parts, Part II, collage: (drawing paper), oil paint, wax crayon, lead pencil on paper, 70 × 100 cm, Collection Cy Twombly Foundation



6.1 Cy Twombly: *Orpheus*, Rome, May 1979, oil paint, wax crayon, lead pencil on cardboard, 80.8 × 60.8 cm, Basel, Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation, on permanent loan to the Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel



6.2 Cy Twombly: *Orpheus*, Rome, May 1979, oil paint, wax crayon, lead pencil on cardboard, 80.8 × 60.7 cm, Basel, Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation, on permanent loan to the Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel

plangent in Rilke's poem, which includes the uncertain dimensions of a centre that does not hold, a melancholy stare, and deathly disappearance into one's own gaze. Quoting and writing, drawing and making, using the materials he had to hand, Twombly adapts Rilke's revised Narcissus story to his current preoccupations—inflected previously by his reading of Ovid, and later by his discovery of Rilke's poetry.²³ Did he reflect on what he would have found elsewhere in the notes to his copy of *Sonnets to Orpheus*? Surviving evidence suggests that he did.

Rilke's Sonnet 12, Part II (containing the Ovidian figure of Daphne's transformation into a laurel, a passage Twombly also copied out) elicits a note by Herter Norton on the difficulty of translating the phrase '*den erkennt die Erkennung*', which she renders as 'him Cognizance knows' (sonnet 12).²⁴ A literal translation, she suggests, would be 'him Recognition recognizes'. Comparing her version with J.B. Leishman's translation, 'he is discerned by Discerning', she concludes that neither of these 'seems quite to cover the breath of "apprehension by the understanding" I take to be implicit in Rilke's phrase.'²⁵ This subtle equivocation over the relation between cognition and re-cognition, understanding and discernment, perfectly encapsulates the conceptual frame for Twombly's own 'allusions'—the ambiguous act of cognition and self-recognition enabled by thinking through and in poetry.

Twombly duly inscribed Rilke's phrase ('*den erkennt die Erkennung*') on two drawings belonging to the 1979 series whose central motif consists of Orpheus's name, variously rendered in Greek and in English letters (ills. 6.1–6.2).²⁶ For Rilke, Orpheus's fate prompts the act of self-(re)cogni-

op. cit., ii. 56 (*Narziss*). In their Rilkean context, these lines allude to the uncertain dimensions of a centre that does not hold, or death by disappearance into one's own gaze. This was one of the passages Twombly copied out; see Cy Twombly Archive, Letter 85.

23 A faint reflection coloring Twombly's retrospective re-reading of Ovid in the light of his *Narcissus* (1975) can perhaps be seen in his mirror rendering of the name 'OVIDIUS' in the relevant sheet of his *Six Latin Writers and Poets* (1976), where the letters of Ovid's name are similarly doubled in blue letters.

24 See Rilke: *Sonnets to Orpheus*, trans. Norton, op. cit., 157; the note explicates Part II, Sonnet 12 (containing Rilke's Ovidian reference to Daphne's transformation into a laurel). The sonnet begins, 'Will transformation.' ('*Wolle die Wandlung.*') and refers to 'the realm of serene creation' ('*das heiter Geschaffne*'); see *ibid.*, 92–3.

25 *Ibid.*, 157.

26 See YL VII 45–49. On the back of YL VII 48, Twombly has written, '*ORpheus, die sonnette an ORpheos second part fragment from sonnet 12*'—the sonnet

tion; creation and self-seeing are intertwined in the mysterious destructive and creative storm that gave rise to his *Sonnets* as a culminating reflection on his art: 'Mirrors: never yet has anyone described, / knowing, what you are really like.'²⁷ The figure of a self-mirroring Narcissus mutates in Twombly's unfolding artistic narrative into Rilke's Orpheus—looking back while singing, broken and scattered into the letters of his name, his voice still sounding in nature. A figure for cognition, mourning, and lyric poetry, as distinct from Narcissus's captation by the image, Rilke's Orpheus—Rilke's poetry—opens new possibilities for retrospective self-understanding: '*den erkennt die Erkennung*': 'him Cognizance knows.'

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containing Rilke's Ovidian reference to Daphne, lines Twombly had copied out: 'And the transformed Daphne, since feeling / laurel-like, wants you to change yourself into wind.' (see Rilke: *Sonnets to Orpheus*, trans. Norton, op. cit., 93); see also Cy Twombly Archive, 18.09.10.

27 '*Spiegel: noch nie hat man wissend beschrieben, / was ihr in euerem Wesen seid.*'; Rilke: *Sonnets to Orpheus*, trans. Norton, op. cit., 74.



1 Cy Twombly: *Study for Presence of a Myth*, Rome, 1959, lead pencil, oil paint, colored pencil on canvas, 178 × 200 cm, Basel, Kunstmuseum Basel, inv. G 1979.11

MARTINA DOBBE

MEDIALITY, TEXT, AND IMAGE. ASPECTS OF THEORETICAL DISCOURSE ABOUT THE WORKS OF CY TWOMBLY

With its dual connection to the American and European—particularly Roman—artistic and cultural contexts of its time, Cy Twombly's oeuvre constitutes a true challenge for the investigation of the genesis, dynamics, and mediality of cultural figurations in the sense of the question about such "morphomes" as conceptualized in the Cologne college at Morphomata. On the one hand, this is true as a result of the breadth of subjects pursued by Twombly—or that one can pursue about Twombly—that are broached as texts in the title of the conference, "Cy Twombly: Image, Text, Paratext."¹ On the other hand, this results from the diversity of medial practices in an oeuvre of drawing, painting, text, and image, in which those practices systematically transgress the textual, in Gérard Genette's sense, ultimately interrogating the paradigm of the text based on its paratextual aspects.² Here, the difficulty (and opportunity) of undertaking a more precise engagement with Twombly in the context of the conference's "morphomata" may lie in the more exact investigation of the connection, the relationship, or the reactions between text and paratext, subject matter and mediality, in order to locate the methodological consequences for the conceptualization of what "morphome" could mean, as well as for the question of mediality, text, and image in Twombly's work.

1 The present text is based on a lecture prepared in June 2012 for the conference "Cy Twombly: Bild, Text, Paratext," hosted by the Morphomata International Center for Advanced Studies at the University of Cologne.

2 Cf. Gérard Genette: *Paratexts. Thresholds of Interpretation*. Cambridge 1997 (1987) and Gérard Genette: *Palimpsests. Literature in the Second Degree*. Nebraska 1997 (1982).

Our observations begin with Twombly's painting *Study for Presence of a Myth* (ill. 1). On a brightly grounded canvas, the painting from 1959 shows and gathers almost the entire repertoire of signs that would also be used in his later works, the "personal shorthand devices that occasionally suggest winged forms; phallic signs; graph-like rising and falling lines; circles that become breasts, clouds, and so on."³ To that must be added numbers, number sequences, diagrams, roughly sketched geometric forms, rectangles and such, as well as forms of writing, written scribbles that are solely analogous to text as a result of their arrangements into something resembling lines, and actual words like the title (above right), and—in the same area but placed further down—the series of letters "DELOS" and "VALLEY," which can be understood as topographical clues or poetic allusions to the island of Apollo and the "Valley of Muses"⁴ at the base of the Mount Helicon. In addition, in parentheses and crossed out, "EPIC MAKING" is written—a comment that, if understood as the painting's motto, serves as a naming of its literary horizon.

What makes the work interesting for the following considerations is the fact that we're dealing here with a study—that is, a pre-final depiction. And beyond that, it is a study for the presence or visualization of a myth, but not, however, of a particular myth or text. "The study of literature and the arts" has repeatedly described how "myths cannot be defined by particular content but rather by virtue of a special means of narration that co-produces the conditions of its own evidence."⁵ As Gregor Stemmrich writes, Twombly's study therefore seems "aimed at pictorial research that [...] takes as its subject the presence effect of this type of narration as such"⁶—and in such a manner that memory, as a constitutive element of narration and of what is narrated, is raised as a topic for discussion with the fleeting notations of these images. In this sense, one can understand the cosmos of signs in *Study for Presence of a Myth* as a "kind of protocol,"⁷ a protocol for a work of memory for which

3 Kirk Varnedoe in: New York 1994, 33.

4 Cf. Twombly's *Vale of the Muses*, 1960 (HB I 175), created at the same time.

5 Stemmrich 2009, 73 [English version here is translated from the German]. Stemmrich refers to Gottfried Boehm: *Mythos als bildnerischer Prozeß*. In: Karl Heinz Bohrer (Ed.): *Mythos und Moderne*. Frankfurt a.M. 1983, 528–544 as well as Karl Kerényi: *Mythos in verbaler Form*. In: Helmut Höfling (Ed.): *Beiträge zu Philosophie und Wissenschaft. Festschrift W. Szilasi*. Munich 1960, 121–128.

6 Stemmrich 2009, 73.

7 Gottfried Boehm in: Del Roscio 2002, 183.

remembering and forgetting, the emergence of individual memories as well as their submergence in a torrent of oblivion, is characteristic. In this event, the border between text and paratext is also swept away in the flow.

The following deliberations primarily consider academic art critics' treatment of questions on the mediality of text and image in Twombly's work. In the past thirty years, various ways of defining the relationship between text and image in Twombly's oeuvre have been interpretively attempted, especially definitions of relationships that have questioned the commonalities and differences of text and image as media in the sense of the "performance of an operation"⁸ in painting. Constantly finding new approaches, the discourse was not limited to the mediality of text and image. Rather, at the same time, fundamental theses on pictorial theory were formulated based on Twombly's work; indeed, Twombly's oeuvre can be considered a recurring point of reference for considerations of art theory in the context of the "iconic turn." I would like to recapitulate a few of the prominent points of intersection shared by these discussions of Twombly's work and of questions of art theory in order to discern the impulses gained by the paratextual examination of Cy Twombly's work in the question of the image.

The traditional, art historical, evolutionary narrative for the examination of Cy Twombly's work—presented here in unavoidably abbreviated form—runs along the following lines: As a painter belonging to the so-called second generation of American abstract expressionism, Twombly—along with Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns—stands at the beginning of the visual critique of American modernism. Twombly developed his concept of painting in the time when the first generation of abstract expressionism (with Pollock, Newman, de Kooning, and Kline) had reached its apex of appreciation. In 1950, after Twombly, at age 22, had completed his studies at the Boston Museum School of Fine Arts and the Washington and Lee University in Lexington and headed to New York to study at the Art Students League, *Life* magazine introduced Jackson Pollock to its readers with the provocative question, "Is He the Greatest Living Painter in the United States?"⁹ In 1951, Twombly met Robert Motherwell and Franz Kline at Black Mountain College in North Carolina. His grappling with their positions is unmistakable in his early work.

8 Christian Stetter: *Medienphilosophie der Schrift*. In: Mike Sandbothe (Ed.): *Systematische Medienphilosophie*. Berlin 2005, 130.

9 Dorothy Seiberling: Jackson Pollock: Is He the Greatest Living Painter in the United States? In: *Life*, vol. 27, no. 8, August 1949.



2 Cy Twombly: *Didim*, Black Mountain Collage, 1951, oil-based house paint on masonite, 46 × 61.5 cm, Collection Cy Twombly Foundation



3 Franz Kline: *Untitled*, 1957, oil on canvas, 200 × 158 cm, Düsseldorf, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen

By comparing, for example, Twombly's *Didim* (ill. 2) and Kline's *Untitled* (ill. 3), we can see that Twombly does not simply place a black sign on a light, white, or ocher ground, as is typical in the black-and-white paintings of Franz Kline. Rather, the dark and light parts have been worked into each other so that the sign and its formal stability develop from the harmony and tension of ocher and black. In *Didim*, the impulse



4 Cy Twombly: *Untitled*, Rome, 1953, pencil on paper, 28 × 21.5 cm, New York, Private Collection



5 Cy Twombly: *Quarzazat*, New York, 1953, white lead, oil-based house paint, wax crayon on canvas, 132 × 172.7 cm, Private Collection

for movement in the areas of light coloration, the clearly visible expressivity of the facture, is just as essential to the visual impression as the dark, elemental structure pressing towards solidity. While the dynamic equilibrium, the eccentric position of a formal sign presented in aggressive close-up¹⁰, was characteristic of Kline's works in the 1950s, Twombly built upon a relatively calm composition based on a symmetrical axis. This lends *Didim* an intentionally unheroic quality¹¹, placing it in clear contradistinction to the gestures of abstract expressionism.

Twombly's next group of works—I'm referring to those produced during, or at the end, of his travels to Europe and North Africa in 1952/53—also pursue this "strategy." On the one hand, their focus is concentrated on powerful, fetishlike cultic signs; on the other, Twombly's visual execution restrains their optic potency. What is primarily distinctive is the arrangement of Twombly's sketch books from the journey (ill. 4). Page after page is filled with crayon or pencil drawings of indigenous art objects, mostly totemic or phallic fetishes, objects that Twombly had probably studied above all in the displays of the Pigorini National Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography in Rome. As Kirk Varnedoe writes: "Though the motifs do not lend themselves to precise identification, [...] [t]he drawings appear to show tuberous bundles, twig fascias, and decorative accessories, made perhaps from perforated, partially depilated hides and ornamentally stitched fabric with coarsely nubbed textures. [...] The drawings also suggest forms studded with nails or other embellishments, or hung with tassels, fringes, thatches of raffia, and pendants of feathers and hair."¹²

These ritual objects, possessing a rather singular sign character as fetishes, are relativized in their claim to power by virtue of the manner of arrangement—the row-like listing as if in a register or inventory catalogue, occasionally furnished with information on material or color. Twombly seems to have been fascinated less by the forms and more by the surfaces and textures—on an informal level, one could say. Correspondingly, the paintings he completed in New York upon his return from Europe and

10 Talk of the close-up in Kline's work refers, alongside the visual results, to Kline's practice of finding the formal signs of his paintings by enlarging small-format drawings with an episcopo. At the start of his gestural abstraction, Kline probably used actual drawings of objects and then, using enlarged projections, defined a—nonobjective—detail as a formal sign of a painting.

11 Smith 1987, 16: "Twombly's approach to abstract expressionism was intentionally unheroic."

12 Kirk Varnedoe in: New York 1994, 17–18.

North Africa demonstrate a concentration on surface—what is, for the first time, a clear incorporation, an inscription, of linear elements in the ground. *Quarzazat* (ill. 5), whose title refers to a North African village, is a characteristic example. What was drawn in the sketch books as a decorative accessory, as a “primitive” ornament, is now incorporated into the materiality of the paint itself; the surface of the paint is cut open by the graphic process the way the object’s surface was by nails or notches—the “skin” of the painting is scratched and wounded. As a result, the dissolution of form is taken so far that, primarily in the left half of the image, contours and scratches have become indistinguishable, as have lines that determine forms versus those that are mere markings.

With the so-called *Augusta Drawings* (ill. 6), the work on and with the surface of the image undergoes a drastic change. Created at the end of 1953, during his military service in Augusta, Georgia, these works once again take up the basic motifs of the North African drawings—bundles, cords, tufts, etc.—but with a “greater emphasis on fluidity, they are now transposed into more insistently biomorphic entities, and the former knots, fringes, and pendants here evoke orifices, hirsute tufts, and horse-tail plumes of erupting effluvia.”¹³ One of the recurring motifs, as Kirk Varnedoe described it, was a kind of “polyp with a tubular appendage that slinks and curls like an anteater’s tongue, gustily spurting from both its rear sac and extended snout.”¹⁴ These biomorphic motifs emerge a short time later in paintings such as *Untitled* (1954; ill. 7), where comparable forms are recognizable particularly in the right half of the image. Materially, the painting once again involves a different application of color and paint. Instead of the compact ceruse that gave *Quarzazat* a dense, corporeal surface that could be worked into, fluid and half-transparent areas of color are predominant here. On top of the pencil and crayon drawings, Twombly places a kind of wax varnish, so that this cloudy, matte “color” renders the linear sections underneath faint and blurry. Or he works with creamy, sometimes pinkish shades of white in a spotted and sprayed application so that it creates “connotations of flesh, skin, and fluids—of spillage, excess, and overflow.”¹⁵ “In dialogue with the imagery of release and flow, the ruddy, recurrently overpainted surface speaks of staining and smeared effacement.”¹⁶ Twombly’s work with lead

¹³ Ibid., 19.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 20.

¹⁶ Ibid.



6 Cy Twombly: *Untitled*, Augusta, Georgia, 1954, pencil on paper, 48.2 × 63.5 cm, Collection Cy Twombly Foundation



7 Cy Twombly: *Untitled*, New York, 1954, oil-based house paint, wax crayon, lead pencil on canvas, 174.5 × 218.5 cm, Collection Cy Twombly Foundation

and wax doesn't constitute an expressive gesture so much as it does an impulsive scribble. Established shapes and erratic symbols from his early works have almost disappeared; individual and isolated graphisms have replaced them, "jittery" lines that consume their energy "there and then" and ultimately sink into the background. The move into fleeting and fluid graphisms begins. The fact that Twombly drew his works blind (like the Surrealists) during his military service, or at least in the dark, without being able to see what he was doing, could explain this disappearance.

This tendency is finally confirmed in *Panorama* (ill. 8), a work considered a "masterpiece of the early years."¹⁷ With *Panorama*, Twombly's line becomes conclusively scriptural. On the dark ground prepared with a thinly spread layer of paint, Twombly places lines of chalk that look as if they had been smeared on a school's chalkboard, rubbed in and wiped out, the result of a "graphic pruritus,"¹⁸ as Roland Barthes says. Laid out on a giant format, *Panorama* is often compared to Pollock's *Drippings* (ill. 9).¹⁹ This is justifiable when one considers the concentration, the "loose mesh of overlaid lines."²⁰ The comparison with Pollock draws attention to Twombly's fundamental difference from abstract expressionism, shown in the direct comparison whereby the liquefaction of the line in Twombly's work is not, as with Pollock, the consequence of an increasing separation of the line *from* the ground, i.e., of an absoluteness of the line, but rather, conversely, the result of a disintegration of the line *in* the ground.

"1957, the year of the relocation to Rome, can be viewed as a decisive turn. Since then, Twombly has written the line"²¹; alongside the scribble and scrawl, the gestures and graphemes, there emerge—again and again—letters, series of letters, and words in Twombly's paintings. As early as *Olympia* (ill. 10), the first work from Rome, there are individual graphisms as letters; a few of them cannot be assigned to any words, but others—"OLYMPIA" on the right margin of the picture, "ROMA" twice on the lower edge, "MORTE" above the center and to the right—can be recognized as "lexical." Certainly, the lexical quality of the script competes with the clarity of the lines; the script, however, is always "operating under

¹⁷ Smith 1987, 17.

¹⁸ Roland Barthes in: Barthes 1991, 162.

¹⁹ Berlin 1994, 22. Cf. Dobbe 1999, 209 ff. for more detail, as well as the discussion towards the end of the present text.

²⁰ New York 1994, 21.

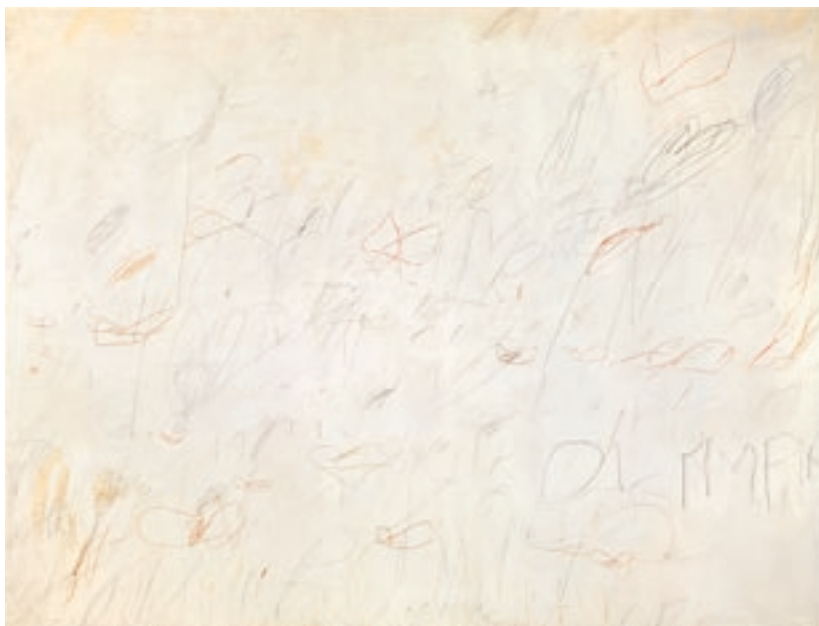
²¹ Göricke 1995, 22.



8 Cy Twombly: *Panorama*, New York, 1955, oil-based house paint, wax crayon, chalk on canvas, 254 × 340.4 cm, Daros Collection, Switzerland



9 Jackson Pollock: *Number 32*, 1950, Duco (varnish) on canvas, 269 × 477.5 cm, Düsseldorf, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen



10 Cy Twombly: *Olympia*, Rome, 1957, oil-based house paint, wax crayon, colored pencil, lead pencil on canvas, 200 × 264.5 cm, Private Collection

pictorial conditions and is thus *to be seen*.”²² Nowhere does the script take on its—abstract—significance. Rather, it’s the case that “all signs remain latent, they are the results of erasures, superimpositions, effacements”²³—only visible as traces in the materiality of the ground. Twombly’s “*gauche*”²⁴ line (Roland Barthes’ emblematic characterization of Twombly’s stroke) thus opens itself to the text, but admittedly only in order to evade any signifying, defining, or codifying power. What “OLYMPIA,” “ROMA,” and “MORTE” actually signify remains uncertain because “OLYMPIA,” “ROMA,” and “MORTE” are individually and graphically set apart—as drawing. It was, however, just this uncertainty that repeatedly induced interpreters to attempt new interpretations and also contributed to the problematic polarity shaping the Twombly literature between a scatological (American) and mythological (European) interpretation. Thus, “OLYMPIA,” “ROMA,” and “MORTE” were construed in (primarily European) criticism as being allusions to antiquity, including a commentary on the ephemeral character of this world (“MORTE”), while it was established by other (primarily American) criticism that Twombly had not merely written “OLYMPIA” but actually “FUCK OLYMPIA”²⁵: an index, as Spies notes in reference to Krauss, for the fact that—beyond the “abstraction” and the “elegant conjuration” of occidental culture, “the critical-aggressive undertone [would have to be taken] as a measure of the reading of these images.”²⁶ And this would be directed against the idealization of the antique tradition as much as against the stylization of Manet’s “whore”—that is to say, against the stylization of Manet’s scandalous image *Olympia* as an icon of modernism. Along these lines, and in opposition to the overwhelmingly European, “humanistic” (mis-) interpretation, Rosalind Krauss stresses “that what takes place in each of Twombly’s works is an attack on seriousness, on decorum, one that ‘takes on the appearance of an incongruity, a mockery, a deflation [...]’”²⁷

²² Boehm 1985, 54.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Cf. Roland Barthes in: Barthes 1991, 163.

²⁵ Cf. Rosalind Krauss: *The Optical Unconscious*. Cambridge/Mass. 1993; ead.: Cy’s up. In: *Artforum International*. Sept. 1994, 72–74, 118; ead.: Le Cours latin. In: *Les Cahiers du Musée National d’Art Moderne* 53, Fall 1995, 4–23; ead.: Olympia. In: Yve-Alain Bois / Rosalind Krauss: *Formless. A User’s Guide*. New York 1997, 147–151.

²⁶ Werner Spies: Das Geschlecht der Engel. Heimkehr eines verlorenen Sohnes – Cy Twombly in New York. In: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 30 Nov. 1994, passim.

²⁷ Krauss 1994, op. cit., 118.

It can hardly be a coincidence that *Olympia*, one of the first Roman works, essentially ignited the discussion about Twombly's painting. Too much came together to reject the suggestion of the evolutionary narrative that saw the emergence of fundamentally new—and, for the following decades, formative—characteristics subsequent to Twombly's move from New York to Rome: Twombly's *Olympia*, more than all previously realized works, eluded the expressionistic and subjective gestures of the first generation of abstract expressionist painting. In place of the triumph of expressionism and abstraction, one found a painting of reification: With the integration of legible script, a new kind of (objective) representation seemed to be inaugurated. While his contemporaries Rauschenberg and Johns practiced overcoming abstraction by integrating everyday objects in terms of proto-pop art (and, in doing so, integrated forms of textual citation such as newspaper clippings and messages from advertisements), Twombly trusted the textual allusion. This in turn seemed to be rendered, or capable of being rendered, concrete as graffiti, so that comparisons between Twombly's repertoire of signs (that encompassed text just as much as sexist artifacts such as "telephone booth or toilet scrawl"²⁸) with antique graffiti as well as with contemporary graffiti from public and semi-public spaces. At first formulated as negative criticism—the talk was of "emphatic latrinograms" and the "neoclassicism of the men's room"²⁹—this understanding grew more positive to such an extent that the "sensory vitality of pre-lingual and pre-rational forms of expression"³⁰ was emphasized and the "street urchin"³¹ in Twombly was affirmed. In concrete terms, however, Twombly's painting also appeared as "antique"

28 Robert Pincus-Witten: Learning to Write. In: Id.: *Eye to Eye. Twenty Years of Art Criticism*. Ann Arbor / Michigan 1984, 87.

29 A representative example of this negative criticism is Edouard Roditi's article, "The Widening Gap," which includes statements such as: "Cy Twombly's hesitant but emphatic latrinograms are as nerve-rackingly eloquent as an inveterate stammerer's request to be shown his way to the toilet." (Edouard Roditi: The Widening Gap. In: *Arts Magazine*, Jan. 1962, 55). An early German review leans the same way, speaking of the "neoclassicism of the men's room" (qtd. in Manfred de la Motte: Cy Twombly. In: *blätter und bilder*. No. 12, Jan./Feb. 1961, 64). Regarding early American criticism of Twombly, cf. the overview by Kirk Varnedoe in: New York 1994, 18 ff.

30 Martin Heller: Cy Twombly: Imitation als Methode. In: Jörg Huber u.a. (Ed.): *Imitation. Nachahmung und Modell. Von der Lust am Falschen*. Basel / Frankfurt a.M. 1989, 163 (For his part, Heller reviews these topoi in order to reject them).

31 Ibid., 162.

or contemporary graffiti because his painting differed materially since his move to Rome: the American, in addition to oil and emulsion paint, now used *cementito* paint, a common Italian wall paint whose admixture (with plaster or kaolin)³² guarantees a corporeal exemplification, so to speak, of reality (in the sense of the wall, dirt, etc.).

At this point, I would rather not pursue the conflicting arguments of the evolutionary narrative regarding *Olympia*; instead, let us understand the work as a springboard for a more precise interrogation of the—implicit—arguments about the aesthetics of the media. In any case, the use of the topologically rooted opposition between a scatological (American) and mythological (European) interpretation of scriptural aspects of Twombly's work strikes me as less productive than the reconstruction of the definition of the relationship between mediality, text, and image utilized in these interpretations. The discussion of the basic issues of an art history reflecting pictorial theory, and the extent to which those issues apply to Twombly's work, only become clear in this systematic perspective.

In this respect, the vehemence of Rosalind Krauss' opinion regarding Twombly's scatological aspects can probably only be understood in the context of her struggle with the medial purism of Clement Greenberg, whose theses made him the voice of the first generation of abstract expressionism. Krauss' support for the dirty aspects and smearings in Twombly's work contrasts not only with the European "mythologizing" of Twombly's painting but also, to an equal if not greater extent, with the medial purism of Clement Greenberg, who saw this purism as being embodied in "pure" abstraction, e.g., in that of a Pollock. With this thesis—"The history of avant-garde painting is that of a progressive surrender to the resistance of its medium"³³, a kind of master narrative of modernism—Greenberg had opened up the discussion of the medial

32 "One can assume that, on Twombly's first trips to Italy, Italian artists contributed to this peculiar use of the color white, distinguished less by its purity and more by a certain dirtiness. The Italians' white is not merely white paint; it is a wall paint called *cementite*, consisting of paint mixed with plaster or kaolin." (Sherin Najjar: *The Line is the Feeling.* "Dimensionen des Performativen in Cy Twomblys Arbeiten auf Papier von 1955–1979." Diss. FU Berlin 2009, 39 f.); Leeman 2005, 39 f., also contemplates Twombly's experiences in Morocco as an inspiration ("the walls of the 'white' Tétouan").

33 Clement Greenberg: *The Collected Essays and Criticism*. Ed. John O'Brian. Vols. 1–2. Chicago/London 1986, vol. 1, 34.

aesthetics of art to (European) modernity and (American) modernism, providing it with the historically and systematically defining concept of a telos of purity. Originally a literary critic who first emerged in the 1930s with a review of Brecht's *Threepenny Opera*, Greenberg, with his formalist perspective on the medium and its specifications, shaped the American discourse on art through the early 1960s. In his texts—especially *Towards a Newer Laocoon* (1940), *American Type Painting* (1955) and *Modernist Painting* (1960)—he pursued a line of argument that was both systematic and historical. Systematically, Greenberg wanted to interrogate the various arts in terms of the specifications of their media and to define their medial characteristics, which converged neither with the generic distinctions of the visual arts nor with the merely material definitions of the various arts. “It is by virtue of its medium that each art is unique and strictly itself,”³⁴ as is already stated in 1940 in *Towards a Newer Laocoon*. The title of this publication points to the origin of his approach. Greenberg is building on Lessing's reflections in *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (1766). More clearly than Lessing, whose distinction between spatial and temporal arts, and painting and poetry, ultimately rests on the “comparison of the means of representation rather than the media,”³⁵ Greenberg actually inquires as to the medial conditions for the possibility of art, especially painting; in this respect, the means of representation—in painting, for example, the canvas as a surface or “flatness”—do not primarily interest him in a material respect but rather in terms of their function of generating an image. In a sense, Greenberg formulated a media theory amplified by pictorial theory *avant la lettre*. In doing so, he understood Lessing's text not only as an early examination of painting and poetry in a comparison steeped in semiotic theory but also—as Karlheinz Stierle later formulated from the perspective of a semiotic aesthetics—as the “apex of the reflection of the eighteenth century that penetrates the relations of medium, work, and aesthetic experience.”³⁶ For nineteenth century modernity and, above all, for the abstract avant-gardes of the twentieth century, this reflection emphatically reaches a height, in Greenberg's eyes, as the medial self-reflection of the

³⁴ Ibid., 32.

³⁵ Gottfried Boehm: Bild und Zeit. In: Hannelore Paflik (Ed.): *Das Phänomen Zeit in Kunst und Wissenschaft*. Weinheim 1987, 6.

³⁶ Karlheinz Stierle: Das bequeme Verhältnis. Lessings *Laokoon* und die Entdeckung des ästhetischen Mediums. In: Gunter Gebauer (Ed.): *Das Laokoon-Projekt. Pläne einer semiotischen Ästhetik*. Stuttgart 1984, 37.

arts. "Realistic, naturalistic art had dissembled the medium, using art to conceal art; Modernism used art to call attention to art. The limitations that constitute the medium of painting—the flat surface, the shape of the support, the properties of the pigment—[...] came to be regarded as positive factors, and were acknowledged openly."³⁷ Greenberg saw these features as being quintessentially represented in Pollock's drippings, with their "absolute" mesh of lines and a surface that utterly refrains from any illusionistic reinterpretation. As a result, the reinterpretation of the canvas as a—tangible—wall, as Twombly put into effect, must have been irritating. Twombly's painting didn't fit into Greenberg's narrative.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, a forceful critique of this model for an aesthetics of the media of modernism arose. To the extent that contemporary American art challenged the paradigms of abstract expressionism—with the rise of proto-pop art by Twombly, Rauschenberg, and Johns, with the pop art of Andy Warhol and the minimalism of Frank Stella or Robert Ryman—Greenberg's case for the painting of the New York School came under pressure. With increasing frequency, his understanding of modernism was discussed using terms that had clearly negative connotations ("formalism," "purism," "dogmatism"). The critique aimed on the one hand at the historical, teleological thinking, against the linear interpretation of art history that—as part of the (post-)structuralist reception of American art criticism—was being characterized and deconstructed as a metanarrative.³⁸ More and more often, Greenberg had to entertain the question of what, after the allegedly final reduction, the reduction to the empty canvas, could be aspired to in the mode of medial self-reflection.³⁹ On the other hand, Greenberg's systematic perspective, the focus on pure, medial self-definition, was also criticized. It is questionable as to whether the idea of medial transparency and self-criticism as being an imperative of art—or "good" art—is really sustainable. Greenberg's vote for the medial specificity of modernism is testament to a thoroughly problematic purism as is manifested (as Rosalind Krauss shows in a

37 Clement Greenberg: *The Collected Essays and Criticism*. Ed. John O'Brian. Vols. 3–4. Chicago/London 1993, vol. 4, 86.

38 Arthur C. Danto: *Reiz und Reflexion. Kunst in der historischen Gegenwart*. Munich 1993, 19 ff.

39 Thierry de Duve: The Monochrome and the Blank Canvas. In: Serge Guilbaut (Ed.): *Reconstructing Modernism. Art in New York, Paris and Montreal 1945–1964*. Cambridge/Mass. 1990, 244–310.

jab at her former mentor) in the sublimation-oriented interpretation of Pollock's painting, which dismissed the indexical and material aspects of the drippings (which Krauss, in a nutshell, saw in Pollock and viewed as being seized upon and scatologically heightened in Twombly) in favor of pure "opticality."⁴⁰ Accordingly, Hal Foster summarized the debate on modernism as follows: "The deconstructive impulse [...] must be distinguished from the self-critical tendency of modernism. This is crucial to the postmodernist break, and no doubt the two operations are different: self-criticism, centered on a medium, does tend (at least under the aegis of formalism) to the essential or 'pure,' whereas deconstruction, on the contrary, decenters, and exposes the 'impurity' of meaning."⁴¹ "Impurity"—or for that matter, the scatological—was the catchphrase by which Twombly's oeuvre could be dealt with as a counterproposal, especially by Rosalind Krauss.

Regarding the discussion of *Olympia*, then, one can see not only the American-European polarity of interpretation of Twombly's painting but also the struggle for a visual reflection that—whether declared as essentialist or purist—declares medial specificity, particularly the medial specificity of painting, as the yardstick for any evaluation. If one pursues the pointed confrontation between Greenberg and Krauss, Twombly's *Olympia* could be understood as a piece of evidence belonging to a discussion on the consequences of this medial specificity for pictorial theory. Greenberg's medial purism—understood as pictorial theory *avant la lettre*—is a plea for understanding imagery as the result of a purification process aimed at the self-expression of the medium, and it is in this context that Twombly's painting abandons the achievements of abstract expressionism. Krauss, on the other hand, makes a plea for understanding imagery as the result of a substantiation of medial characteristics—so that the imagery of Twombly's *Olympia*, in Krauss' eyes, arises first with the substantiation of indexical graphisms as text/graffiti and with the surface as wall. The "performance of an operation,"⁴² i.e., Twombly's use

40 Cf. Krauss' consideration of Greenberg's understanding of Pollock in Krauss 1993, op. cit., ch. VI. Abigail Susik offers an instructive overview: Cy Twombly. Writing after Writing. In: *re.bus*, Fall/Winter 2009, 1–23, here 14 ff.; online: <http://www.essex.ac.uk/arthistory/rebus/issue4.htm> (last access: 27.12.2012).

41 Hal Foster: Re.Post. In: Brian Wallis (Ed.): *Art after Modernism. Rethinking Representation*. Boston / New York 1984, 199 f.

42 Cf. fn. 7.

of text and image as medium, is for Krauss defined as the reification of a “base materialism.”⁴³ This would be set against an ontologization of the material as well as its sublimation qua abstraction and would demand, instead of an essentialist reading of medial specificity, an operational interpretation of the media of text and image.

A second interpretive approach from pictorial theory that has shaped the Twombly discourse goes back to the more exact grappling with graphisms, with the character of the graphic traces as well as the transitions between sign and drawing. *Olympia* can again stand at the start of the discussion because, as was pointed out in a previous quote, Twombly’s line is for the first time “scripted” in *Olympia*. In concentrating on the question of the relation between trace and text, the Twombly literature first drew on Roland Barthes’ talk of a clumsy (*gauche*) line, and thereafter on Derrida’s concept of the trace as text (or the text as trace).

From a phenomenological perspective, this approach becomes clear especially when one again discusses the difference between Pollock’s drippings and the traces of Cy Twombly. Both pictures exhibit traces in the sense of indexical references to the (corporeal/gestural/actional) process of creation. In contrast to Pollock’s “absolute” lines, however, Twombly’s graphisms are, optically speaking, less present, less “there”; they don’t render themselves as absolute in reference to themselves. Rather, Twombly’s work is dealing with the paradox of a “graphic presence whose emergence first announces itself and whose disappearance takes place simultaneously.”⁴⁴ Twombly’s line thus relates to the character of a trace, insofar as “trace” implies the constant and simultaneous drawing and withdrawing of a graphic presence. In its presence, the trace takes hold of something from the past; in doing so, its singular quality arises, however, in the “paradoxical appearance of that ‘which actually

43 Cf. Bois/Krauss 1997, op. cit., passim. “Base materialism” is known as one of four characteristics with which Bois and Krauss distinguish the concept of the “informe” (or “formlessness”) in contrast to modernism (à la Greenberg). In her interview with Bois and Krauss, Lauren Sedofsky states: “As your program, you set up four principles of High Modernism—the vertical, the visual, the instantaneous and the sublimated—and counter them with four operations of the informe—horizontality, base materialism, the pulse, and entropy.” (Lauren Sedofsky: Down and Dirty. In: *Artforum International*, vol. 34, no. 10, Summer 1996, 90–95, 126, 131, 136, here 91).

44 Engelbert 1985, 117.

was never there, of that which is always past'.⁴⁵ Trace is the name for that "which does not allow itself to be apprehended in the simplicity of a present."⁴⁶ What renders the trace visible is not a past as "consummated present"⁴⁷ or a past "in the form of a modified present,"⁴⁸ but rather the never present "was" that is retained in the trace. The presence of a trace is the state of being past; it is its belatedness, its "original delay."⁴⁹ And it is this "delay" that Twombly—by allowing his lines to appear and disappear, placing them and wiping them away—renders graphic. Without question, Pollock's lines are also traces of his actions, traces as visible references to something "that is no longer present"⁵⁰—the action, or the painter in action. However, because Pollock allows the line to step, optically, in front of the canvas, becoming optically absolute, the absolute line presents itself as a line "without history,"⁵¹ as a presence, or as being in the present, without breaking—in material terms—its presence. In contrast, Twombly's line-as-trace is a kind of "self-effacement of its own presence"⁵²—hence, a trace in the sense of just that "difference"⁵³ that Derrida described as the hallmark of the text-as-trace: "différer la

45 Levinas, quoted in Hans-Jürgen Gawoll: *Spur. Gedächtnis und Andersheit*. Teil II: Das Sein und die Differenzen. Heidegger, Levinas und Derrida. In: *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 32 (1989), 281.

46 Jacques Derrida: *Grammatology*. Frankfurt a.M. 1974, e-book. I am above all grateful to Derrida for the explication of the concept of the "trace."

47 *Ibid.*, 116.

48 *Ibid.*

49 "The paradoxical notion of an original delay does not therefore mean the suspension of a potential presence or the postponement of a perception that is already possible; it renders void the experience of a present, to which an antecedent past is appended." (Gawoll 1989, op. cit., 288).

50 Hans-Jürgen Gawoll: *Spur. Gedächtnis und Andersheit*. Teil I: Geschichte des Aufbewahrens. In: *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 30 (1986/87), 45.

51 This is precisely in contrast to the Twombly's clumsy line that, as Twombly determined, presents itself as a line "with history." In a commentary on his own work in 1957, Twombly states: "Each line now is the actual experience with its own innate history." (New York 1994, 27).

52 Jacques Derrida: *Freud und der Schauplatz der Schrift*. In: *Id.: Die Schrift und die Differenz*. Frankfurt a.M. 1976, 349.

53 As is well known, Derrida's conception of *differance* (translated into German as "*Differenz" or "Differänz") is distinct from *différence*: "It is not the question of a constituted difference here, but rather, before all determination of the content, of the pure movement which produces difference. The (pure) trace is *differance*." (Derrida 1974, op. cit., 62).

présence.” Precisely in writing, the irreducibility of “the deferral and withholding of that which does not manifest itself”⁵⁴ is proven. This difference is what Derrida calls “writing”⁵⁵: “Without a retention in the minimal unit of temporal experience [of writing, M.D.], without a trace retaining the other as other in the same, no difference would do its work and no meaning would appear.”⁵⁶ As just such a trace, Twombly’s clumsy line, however, is itself ultimately open for writing.

The consequences of Derrida’s understanding of writing for the discussion of Twombly’s painting and, from here, for the discussion of issues of pictorial theory relating to the mediality of text and image can perhaps be refined on the topos of metapictoriality. Vis-à-vis text as trace, in Twombly’s work, we are not primarily dealing with a confrontation with Derrida’s critique of phonocentrism. Rather, Derrida’s critique of the (Occident’s) secondary status of writing (versus spoken language) is understood as a model in order to comprehend the processuality of the creation of signs in Twombly’s work and, from there, to grasp his understanding of images. The phenomena of the belatedness, the supplementarity and non-presence of Twombly’s graphisms are the identifying features of the imagery that can be seen—and which cannot be secured as a simple reference qua writing. With the model of the trace, one gains, on the one hand, the possibility of characterizing the—indeterminate—writing in Twombly’s work in its indeterminacy. On the other hand, the critique of presence inherent to this model also enables an understanding of the individuation of what an image “is” or does. In the emergence and disappearance of the graphisms, Twombly’s painting “speaks”—always simultaneously—about the medial conditions of its representation, rendering them visible, and this is the specific characteristic of visual representation or showing (*deixis*).

In considering Twombly’s oeuvre, it would be useful here to include the more recent reprise of Derrida’s discussion of writing in the context of cultural theory. Under the heading “Notational Iconicity” (*Schriftbildlichkeit*),

54 Derrida 1974, op. cit., 121 [Translated directly from the German, here].

55 “If I persist in calling that difference writing, it is because, within the work of historical repression, writing was, by its situation, destined to signify the most formidable difference. It threatened the desire for the living speech from the closest proximity, it *breached* living speech from within and from the very beginning. And as we shall begin to see, difference cannot be thought without the *trace*.” (ibid., 56).

56 Ibid., 109.

Sybille Krämer criticizes Derrida's understanding of writing, because, in referring back to the polar comparison of oral and written speech (*graphé* and *phoné*) that he himself criticized while nevertheless keeping present *ex negativo*, Derrida misappropriated essential aspects of text, especially the visual qualities peculiar to text. As a result, in place of the "phonographic, speech-centered" concepts of writing, Krämer raises the contouring of an "iconographic, phonetically neutral concept of text."⁵⁷ Attentiveness to the visual quality or "notational iconicity" of text proves central to this approach.⁵⁸ What is meant is the fact that text, as a system of signs or notation, fundamentally generates itself on the basis of the distance or space between its elements. The benefit of seeing this "interstitial space"⁵⁹ is, on the one hand, that notational forms beyond the writing of the alphabet can be considered, and, on the other, that the linear model of written speech (which illustrates the successive aspect of speaking) is disrupted by the two-dimensional modes of distance between the signs, or even more by the model of an "opaque operational space"⁶⁰ for text. As a result, Krämer's explanation of the "materiality, perceptibility, and operativity of notations" as text can be directly related to Twombly's formal arrangement of signs or graphisms: "Texts are inscribed on surfaces; they 'work' with constellations of space. Although there are directions for reading and writing texts, the order of the text cannot be reduced to its linearity. Scriptural arrangements use—in one way or another—the two-dimensionality and simultaneity of inscribed surfaces. Writing does not merely form 'texts' but rather forms in the first place 'texture': a web of spatial relations."⁶¹

Krämer's efforts at characterizing the notational iconicity of writing are of interest in the present context less because of their consequences for thinking about writing or notation within symbol theory and more

57 Cf. the explanation of the DFG graduate college, "Schriftbildlichkeit. Über Materialität, Wahrnehmbarkeit und Operativität von Notationen": www.geisteswissenschaften.fu-berlin.de/v/schriftbildlichkeit/kolleg/idee/index.html (6. Juni 2012).

58 Sybille Krämer: 'Operationsraum Schrift'. Über einen Perspektivwechsel in der Betrachtung der Schrift. In: Gernot Grube et al. (Ed.): *Schrift. Kulturtechnik zwischen Auge, Hand und Maschine*. Munich 2005, 29 and this.: 'Schriftbildlichkeit' oder: Über eine (fast) vergessene Dimension der Schrift. In: Ead. (Ed.): *Bild – Schrift – Zahl*. Munich 2009, 163.

59 Krämer 2009, op. cit., 164.

60 Krämer 2005, op. cit., 31.

61 Ibid., 52.

because of the supposition that the perspective on the visual aspects of text once again opens up a pictorial distinction in Twombly's painting and, beyond that, a distinctive aspect of pictoriality as it pertains to pictorial theory. Twombly's painting that was discussed at the outset, *Study for Presence of a Myth*, shows, tellingly, alongside the "abstract" graphisms and the text, various forms of notation such as rows of numbers and diagrams that can be identified with Krämer by virtue of their notational iconicity. But what *Study for Presence of a Myth* makes especially clear is how decisive the space between notations is for the painting, indeed for the pictorial narrative—in a graphic sense but also in the sense of the visualization of myth qua memory. "The viewer's instinctive demand for inner coherence in what is presented to him as an image cannot be satisfied in terms of a graphic synthesis that rushes from one pictorial element to another in order to encapsulate diverse experiences in an overarching idea [the notations do not come together—M.D.]; rather, the demand is directed to that which every mark indicates as a relationship that is as immediate as it is constitutive: to the undifferentiated unity of the pictorial ground."⁶² In this respect, the direction of the graphisms, the text, and the notation leads back to the demand for the picture, or to be more exact, to the demand for the pictorial ground that is exhibited in Twombly's work as the ground of a medial event, i.e., as the condition for rendering image and text possible. Twombly's painting lays bare the visual power of the ground. "If one sees the ground solely as the static conveyer of a given sign, then one is reducing it [...] to a mere surface and is overlooking its foundational potential."⁶³ It is exactly this foundational potential of the ground *in statu nascendi* that *Study for Presence of a Myth* takes as its theme, just as the mythic potential in terms of "EPIC MAKing" is demonstrated.

Thus the discussion of text in Cy Twombly's work shows how the explication of his painting is oriented towards questions of pictorial theory. While the discussion on the scatological character of Twombly's paintings invoked Clement Greenberg's concept and criticism of medium specificity, the quest for an understanding of Twombly's use of writing leads back—by way of the critical discussion on writing-as-trace à la Derrida—to a renewed concentration on a specifically pictorial paradigm,

⁶² Stemmrich 2009, 64.

⁶³ Gottfried Boehm: Der Grund. Über das ikonische Kontinuum. In: Gottfried Boehm / Matteo Burioni (Ed.): *Der Grund. Das Feld des Sichtbaren*. Munich 2012, 65.—Cf. Gottfried Boehm's contribution to the present volume.

to the ground as a “field of the visible.”⁶⁴ In both respects, Twombly’s painting proves itself as part of the never-ending struggle with the question of “what an image is and what an image is not.”⁶⁵

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64 Cf. the formulation of the title, *ibid.*: “Der Grund. Das Feld des Sichtbaren” (“The Ground: The Field of the Visible”).

65 The formulation “what an image is and what an image is not,” which Calvin Tomkins coined for Robert Rauschenberg’s early works, is taken from a text by Carlo Huber: Cy Twombly. In: *Cy Twombly. Bilder 1953–1972* (Exhibition catalog, Kunstmuseum Bern 1973). Bern 1973.

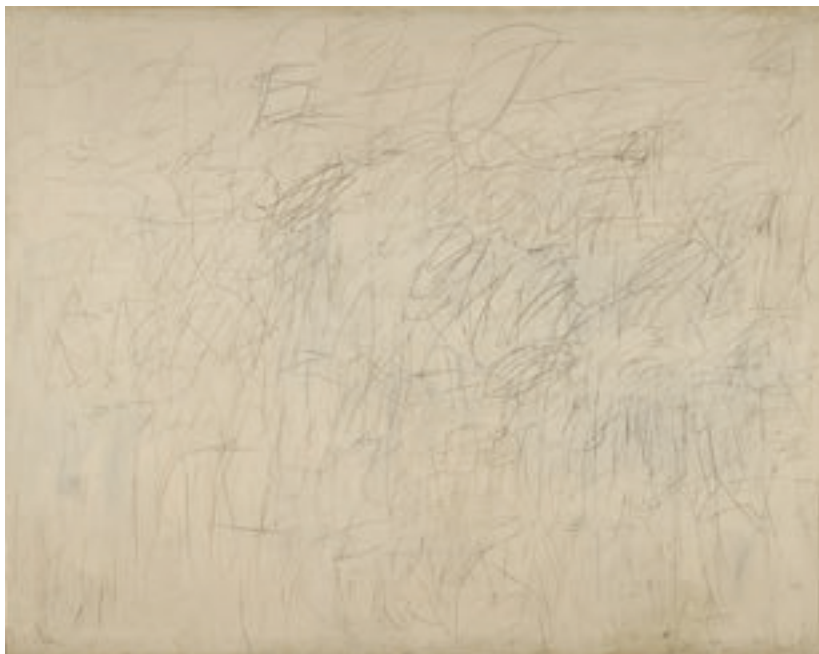
MARTIN ROUSSEL

“CE PASSÉ DU TRAIT”:

ROLAND BARTHES’ PAINTER OF WRITING, TW

For a literary critic, writing about Cy Twombly means speaking about a “painter of writing,” as Roland Barthes described him in his 1979 essay “Non multa sed multum,” which appeared as explanatory notes in the *Catalogue Raisonné des Œuvres sur Papier*¹ (ill. 1). As a result, the following observations are only peripherally related to the paintings and drawings of Cy Twombly—and they are also meant to be peripheral as a contribution on text in the work of the painter Cy Twombly. Twombly, the painter of writing: This is a painter who paints clumsily—*gauche*, as Barthes says, meaning the way a typical right-handed person (and in our writing culture, the right-handed person is per se typical) would write if he were to switch hands. He would have to re-learn writing, at first the way a first-grader draws letters (and, conversely, deciphers them) before he is able to write them (and, conversely, read them). One can argue as to whether the painting of writing is an essential feature of Twombly’s painting, and perhaps one can even debate if all Twombly’s epigraphs, inscriptions, scribbles, quotations, and pseudo-quotations—as well as the lettering that merely may or may not be lettering—can in equal measure be subsumed under the classification of textual paintings. And what significance does this clumsiness possess for Twombly’s textures and, beyond that, his painting (which encloses and/or creates these textures). In this, I am differentiating myself from Roland Barthes who, despite all efforts at separating Twombly’s work from his signature, from his most recent signing, nevertheless noted an essential sign of the painter: “[F]or writing,” says TW’s work, as we might say elsewhere: ‘for taking,’

1 In: Barthes 1991, 167, which includes the earlier text, “The Wisdom of Art” alongside “Non multa sed multum.” The page numbers for quotations from these two essays will be noted in the body of the text.



1 Cy Twombly: *Academy*, New York, 1955, oil-based house paint, lead pencil, colored pencil, pastel on canvas, 191 × 241 cm, New York, The Museum of Modern Art, Mary Sisler bequest, Richard S. Zeisler bequest, and gift of Mrs. Sam A. Lewinsohn (all by exchange), 2010

'for eating.'² At the same time, I am following Barthes in analyzing the significance, function, and manner of functioning of text in the work of Cy Twombly. What interests me here is not the generation of a thesis about the work but rather an axiom derived from the interaction of the critic (Barthes) with the work (Twombly): What does it mean to speak of a work (or part of a work) whose affinity to text lies in providing a sort of introductory lecture on text? *For writing*, the way one says *for eating*: Is this evoking the image as a tableau vivant, a table that is "set"? I speak of an axiom because I am not dealing with correspondences between Barthes' thesis and Twombly's work—not about the equivocation that to equal extents summons the critic's discourse and the artist's painting or drawing; rather, for me, this is about the axiom's significance in understanding the relation between painting and writing. In other words: In its statements about TW's clumsy writing and the painter of text, Barthes' essay, at its core, touches on the intersection of two media (image and text) and their common originality: to write "paintingly," writing as painting.

* * *

Such an intersection of painting and text in the primordial sign is reminiscent of a Romantic mythology of script, according to which text, and thus reason and language in general, was art historically determined by its retrospective dependence on sensory forms. As early as 1784, Johann Georg Hamann assumed in his *Metacritique on the Purism of Reason*, a response to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, that "painting and drawing [are the] oldest text."³ The play with this Romantic transformation of cultural

2 Roland Barthes: "Cy Twombly: Non Multa sed Multum," 162. [In *The Responsibility of Forms*, the title was translated as "Cy Twombly: Works on Paper," but the more traditional "Non multa sed Multum" will be used here.—Daniel Mufson]. One must note that Barthes' text, in spite of the title of his essay, insists on referring to Cy Twombly as the painter TW: "Cy Twombly (hereinafter known as TW)" (157). TW: This is the beginning, the entry point, the preparation of the surname, as if Barthes, using a cryptogram of the name, only wanted to prepare us for what everyone knew: giving the works' abstraction the name of Twombly.

3 Johann Georg Hamann: *Metakritik über den Purismen der Vernunft* [1784]. In: *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 3. Ed. Josef Nadler. Vienna 1951, 281–289 ("älteste Schrift Malerey und Zeichnung"). Hamann's concept of text, however, is not semiotic but rather follows the metaphor of the "book of nature": "For that reason, in the *Metacritique* from 1784, the music and the rhythm of one's own pulse are named

history into modernity is, however, more interesting for an understanding of Twombly and Barthes. Thus, the subject of the affiliated arts arises forcefully with Robert Walser, whose writing is from the start understandable in relation to the works of his brother Karl Walser, successful in Berlin as a painter in those days but forgotten today. "Writing strikes me as being derived from drawing," Walser once wrote⁴, and thereby imagined a link between text, transposed into the past, and painting: First from mimetic and then from more abstract visual forms, a more symbolic texture gradually evolved. Many of Walser's texts—for example, the early essay *A Painter*—evoke painting, drawing, imagined landscapes, or even actual paintings as the setting for literature. Admittedly, this is solely about the suggestion of a painter of text, playing out entirely on the surface of the writing, and as a result, Walser's poetic images are permeated by stereotypical figurations, by (white) snow landscapes and (black) fir tree forests, for example, that remain legible as images of text without difficulty. To what end, then, does this detour aim, whereby writing depicts itself in the image? Why does Walser's literature give the impression that painting prevails in its own medium?

as the oldest forms of speech that constitute the categories of time and number just as painting and drawing constitute the oldest written forms in the categories of space. Hamann's pedagogically pragmatic foundation of reason and its claims to validity show that rhythm and writing coincide beneath this aesthetic aspect and do not show any kind of preference for the phonemics [...]. 'Nature' and its 'imitation' have already been conveyed in writing and are essentially understood by Hamann as 'text.'" (Christian Sinn: Schreiben – Reden – Denken. Hamanns transtextuelles Kulturmodell im Kontext der Kabbalarezeption des 18. Jahrhunderts. In: *Das achtzehnte Jahrhundert* 28 [2004], H. 1, 27–45, here 36 f.) [English version here is translated from the German].

⁴ Robert Walser: *Sämtliche Werke in Einzelausgaben*. Ed. by Jochen Greven. Frankfurt a.M. 1986, Vol. 19, 232 (in the following: SW with vol. no.; "*Schreiben scheint mir vom Zeichnen abzustammen*"); cf. the variation in Robert Walser: *Aus dem Bleistiftgebiet. Mikrogramme 1924–1932*. Newly decoded and edited by Bernhard Echte and Werner Morlang on commission from the Robert Walser Archive of the Carl Seelig Foundation, Zurich. 6 vols. Frankfurt a.M. 2003, vol. 4, 410. On the significance of the sentence, cf. Wolfram Groddeck: Robert Walsers "Schreibmaschinenbedenklichkeit". In: Davide Giuriato / Martin Stingelin / Sandro Zanetti (Ed.): "*Schreibkugel ist ein Ding gleich mir: von Eisen*". *Schreibszenen im Zeitalter der Typoskripte*. Munich 2005, 169–182, here 182. Cf. with an overview of research by the author: *Matrikel. Zur Haltung des Schreibens in Robert Walsers Mikrophographie*. Basel / Frankfurt a.M. 2009, 76, fn. 166.

One may consider the traditions of calligraphy here, which the philosopher Ryosuke Ohashi describes as a competition between the arts whereby—as a result—an increasingly nuanced, aesthetic scene of the text-image grows irredeemably complicated.⁵ This struggle for victory, for the phenomenal supremacy, admittedly offers a counter model to Walser, in whose work the text empowers painting, making use of it for its own ends insofar as it evokes the image that, in its way, interprets the text, rendering it visually for the eye. In other words: The writing in the suggestion of the image—in the disappointment stemming from a picture that offers nothing to see, a picture that, insofar as it is written and not painted, is not writing—appears to be all the purer.⁶ But we are not dealing with either—neither a pure text nor a mere “painting-as-text”; we have only to remove the relationships that allow us to distinguish between the spatial appearance of the image and the text. Michel Foucault cited these type of perfidious aesthetic games in the arts in his exposition of two versions of a René Magritte painting. The text is titled *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*, alluding to the inscription on Magritte's pictures in which a pipe is (indisputably) depicted, saying: “This is not a pipe”—part of an emblematic confusion. Foucault explains this confusion as a kind of “unraveled calligram”: “Pursuing its quarry by two paths, the calligram sets the most perfect trap. By its double function, it guarantees capture, as neither discourse alone nor a pure drawing could do.”⁷ Magritte designs a doubled perspective familiar from picture puzzles such as Rubin's vase, in which one can either recognize two discernable faces turned to each other in profile or the contours of a vase whose outline is formed by the aforementioned physiognomies. According to the cognitive perception schemata that prefigure our gaze, one nevertheless always sees just one or the other, never both as one picture—which it undeniably is. Does one see the calligram as the victory of painting over the text presented in the picture, or the victory of the text over the image in which the characters of the text are contained? The “image and text fall each to its own side, of their own weight.”⁸ One seems to lack the specifics of the calligraphic

5 Cf. Ohashi's Einleitung in: Ryosuke Ohashi and Martin Roussel (Eds.): *Buchstaben der Welt – Welt der Buchstaben*. Munich 2014.

6 Cf. Dieter Roser: *Fingierte Mündlichkeit und reine Schrift: zur Sprachproblematik in Robert Walsers späten Texten*. Würzburg 1994.

7 Michel Foucault: *This Is Not a Pipe* (1973). Trans., ed. James Harkness. Berkeley, CA: 1983, 22.

8 Ibid., 28.

“struggle” that are required to settle the question. In Magritte’s pictures and in Foucault’s discourse about them, one has, however, a different situation: The question of the victorious entity is inextricably linked to the question of what one sees; in other words, Magritte’s—or Foucault’s—*Ceci n’est pas une pipe* stands precisely between calligram and picture puzzle. A person needing to explain what is depicted in the image would have to make his case *ad absurdum*:

Because scarcely has he stated, “This is a pipe,” before he must correct himself and stutter, “This is not a pipe, but a drawing of a pipe,” “This is not a pipe but a sentence saying that this is not a pipe,” “The sentence ‘this is not a pipe’ is not a pipe,” “In the sentence ‘this is not a pipe,’ *this* is not a pipe [...]”⁹

And yet one can see a pipe: This is the trap that Magritte’s picture renders unavoidable; with Foucault, we run headlong into it with seeing eyes.

What we find in Walser is not very different. He doesn’t set his trap as a painter, the way Magritte does, but rather as a writer. With him, text seems to grant painting an effortless victory: for example, when the writing “I” sits in his writing room without thinking to write and then decides to take a walk in the countryside, the landscape’s succession of images—how could it be different—is conveyed before the eyes of the reader as text. *The Walk* from 1917 presents the manifesto for such a blatant deception, and, correspondingly, one suspects that it has less to do with the reader’s internal discord (in which Magritte’s reader inevitably finds himself) and rather more with that of the authorial “I” presented in the text (who, of course, is just the narrator, but this presents the smaller complication of the fact that this “I” writes while pretending to go for a walk rather than to write). Walser, one may point out, uses the trap to demonstrate—just in the moment in which the victory of the arts belongs to painting—that text had on the contrary pushed its way in front of painting insofar as it was the medium that had evoked painting.

This game must seem downright frivolous when compared with more enlightened ways of studying reading and writing. Karl Philipp Moritz, for example, in his primer on reading, takes rigorous care to abandon the visualization of the letter, to abandon learning to write by painting; it is a technique that should be forgotten as soon as the hand can write

⁹ Ibid., 30.

fluently, because: "The book lies *in front* of me," while "thinking [lies] *in* me." Moreover: "One can take the book [with its sensory form of letters] away from me. / No one can take thought away from me."¹⁰ In his *The Walk*, Walser counters this type of educational theory with a hopelessness whose only reward consists in the fabrication of the text itself, underhandedly, so to speak, afflicted by a blindness (for writing), i.e., by a blindness that sees (the landscape). (We will come back to this peculiar blindness.)

With his so-called micrograms, Walser produced an extreme case of a reciprocal artistic relationship. He reduced his handwriting in pencil to less than a millimeter in height. In instances where he covered the paper—often trimmed pieces of paper, never larger than book format, many of them much smaller, including business cards, pages from calendars, etc.—with text (or several texts put closely together), as in the case of the 24 uniformly formatted pages containing the rough draft of an entire novel (the so-called *Robber* novel), one gets the impression of a most finely apportioned, homogenized gray tone: The text loses its signification as a contrast and seems to want to blend into the surface. At the same time, this text, this apparently uniform, gray film that the grounding paper hardly seems able to carve through—and the text says nothing else but *figura etymologica*—and that could at best correspond to a vague text image, can become visible apart from the surface on which it was sketched, once it is removed, taken away like a top layer, like a microfiche being enlarged. The unity of surface and text as well as the complete decoupling of the text from the surface in the manuscript are connected here to the paradoxical figure of the origin of writing. This must have been very clear to Walser; his ironic sentence, "Writing strikes me as being derived from drawing," doesn't just designate an insight into this *creatio in situ* but, beyond that, he is also very aware of the significance of such a "system of copying" for the construction of his literature and hence for the accessibility of his texts. In a small text titled *Pencil Sketch* (*Bleistiftskizze*), passed on as microgram and as a clean copy, Walser noted about this idiosyncratic "text scene" that he had at the time (probably in the late teens of the twentieth century) begun "always first to commit my prose to paper in pencil before inking it into definitiveness as neatly as

10 Karl Philipp Moritz: *Neues ABC-Buch*. Illustrations by Wolf Erlbruch. Afterword by Heide Hollmer. Munich 2003, unpag., the seventh image, *Contemplation* ["das Buch liegt vor mir"; "das Denken (...) in mir"; "Das Buch (mit den sinnlichen Buchstabengestalten) kann man mir wegnehmen. / Das Denken kann man mir nicht wegnehmen."].

possible,” and he also noted here that this “increased labor” in writing would “blossom into a peculiar form of happiness.”¹¹ In a letter to Max Rychner of the *Neue Schweizer Rundschau* from 1927, Walser could suggest that this “pencil thing” had “a significance”:

I can assure you that [...] using a pen caused a complete breakdown with my hand, a kind of cramp whose grasp I could only slowly, strenuously escape via the path of the pencil. [...] There was a time of disruption for me that was reflected in my handwriting, in the release from it, and by copying from the penciled version, I boyishly learned once again—to write.¹²

* * *

On Walser’s surfaces, the text is in this way encountered in the moment in which it breaks free from the its pictorial aspects. From this counterpoint, let us once again examine Roland Barthes’ discourse on TW:

On certain surfaces of TW’s there is nothing written, and yet these surfaces seem to be the repository of all writing. Just as Chinese writing was born, we are told, from the tiny cracks of an overheated tortoiseshell, so what appears to be writing in TW’s work is born from the surface itself. No surface, wherever we consider it, is a virgin surface: everything is always, already, rough, discontinuous, unequal, set in motion by some accident: there is the texture of the paper, then the stains, the hatchings, the tracery of strokes, the diagrams, the words. At the end of this chain, writing loses its violence; what is imposed is not this writing or that, nor even the Being of writing, it

11 German original: SW 19, 122 [“*Prosa jeweilen zuerst mit Bleistift aufs Papier zu tragen, bevor ich sie mit der Feder so sauber wie möglich in die Bestimmtheit schrieb*”; “*erhöhte Mühe*”; “*sich für mich zu einem eigentümlichen Glück aus(wachse)*”]. English trans.: Microscripts, 2nd ed., trans. Susan Bernofsky. New York: 2012, 31–32.

12 Robert Walser: *Briefe*. Ed. Jörg Schäfer with Robert Mächler. Zurich and Frankfurt a.M. 1979, 301 [“*Bleistifterei eine Bedeutung*”; “*Ich darf Sie versichern, daß ich (...) mit der Feder einen wahren Zusammenbruch meiner Hand erlebte, eine Art Krampf, aus dessen Klammern ich mich auf dem Bleistiftweg mühsam, langsam befreite. (...) Es gab also für mich eine Zeit der Zerrüttung, die sich gleichsam in der Handschrift, im Ablösen derselben, abspiegelte und beim Abschreiben aus dem Bleistiftauftrag lernte ich knabenhaft wieder – schreiben.*”].

is the idea of a graphic texture: "*for writing*," says TW's work, as we might say elsewhere: "*for taking*," "*for eating*." (161–162)

Cy Twombly's—TW's—painting reveals itself, then, as an obsession with the surface in which "incidents" are "scanned" and the text is only one instance in a series. This lends it its casualness and its "violence," which probably refers to the violence of the inscription, of the "damage" of the granular surface in which, with the text, the flatness and undifferentiated quality of the ground is recorded, traced, and inscribed. Not so with TW's work, where, according to Barthes, the text becomes a "graphic texture," which is to say it manifests itself as a texture of the graphic quality: The texture no longer damages the surface; it belongs to it. This is why Barthes can understand TW's painting as a "receptacle" of text, because TW's text is the texture of the surface: At the point where painting touches its ground (the empty surface), it becomes a matrix of text, like a breeding ground (matrix), but above all like a matrix that allows one to consider nothing but the appearance of text: no smearing of the paint, no borderless "thickness" of space¹³; sheer contrast. Text as contrast, born of the surface, stands in contrast to the surface itself as pure gesture, as exposed gesture that shows: This is text, which for that reason and with this understanding (cognizant or otherwise) begins to "pale":

[S]igns [are there] sometimes, but faded, clumsy (as we have said), as if he were quite indifferent to their being torn up, but especially painting's *final state*, its floor: the paper ("TW admits to having more of a sense of paper than of painting"). And yet there occurs a very strange reversal: because meaning has been extenuated, because paper has become what we must call the *object of desire*, drawing can reappear, absolved of any technical, expressive, or aesthetic function.... (169)

It comes down to this "and yet": In the moment in which the letters of text appear and are readable (or at least discernable), they become (almost) insignificant and only come to illuminate the surface as matrix. Text insists on this contrast in keeping with its entire aesthetic, which consequently has to appear dilettantish (within it): as if Cy Twombly were incapable of writing fluidly and instead could only write as a child who

13 Cf. Sybille Krämer: 'Schriftbildlichkeit' oder: Über eine (fast) vergessene Dimension der Schrift. In: *Bild, Schrift, Zahl*. Ed. by Sibylle Krämer and Horst Bredekamp. Munich 2003, 157–176.

had hardly learned to divest his attention from the motor skills involved in writing. Here, one can think of childlike things as Michel Foucault did, namely as an “alternative space” to the world of adults: “These alternative spaces were not actually invented by the children”—just as Twombly’s handwriting is not that of a child—“because children never invent anything. Rather, the adults invented the children and whispered their wonderful secrets in their ears, and then these adults are astonished when the children regurgitate them.”¹⁴ Twombly’s handwriting thus “regurgitates” (like a child) what the adult so deftly hid in a scrawled style. Writing like a child thus remains a fiction, the highest form of art that actually constitutes more of a discovery of the essence of text.¹⁵

“The words I want to utter here have their own will.” This is how a late, micrographically written text by Walser from the 1920s begins (ill. 2.1).¹⁶ The text on the microgram with the archive number 12 begins

14 Michel Foucault: *Die Heterotopien / Les hétérotopies. Der utopische Körper / Le corps utopique. Zwei Radiovorträge*. German trans. from French by Michael Bischoff, afterword by Daniel Defert. Frankfurt a.M. 2005, 10 [English version here is translated from the German].

15 The phantasm of what is childlike supports, in keeping with its power of this secret, a messianism that belongs to that of the eternal new beginning. On this messianic aspect discussed at various times by Agamben, cf. from the author: *Der Riese Tomzack. Robert Walsers monströse Moderne*. In: Achim Geisenhanslüke / Georg Mein (Ed.): *Monströse Ordnungen. Zur Typologie und Ästhetik des Anormalen*. Bielefeld 2009, 363–400, esp. 390–397. When Walser writes (like a child), he writes like a child writes: The evocation of what is childlike superimposes the writing, so that the beginning of writing seems to step back behind the arduous formation of letters.—*Fritz Kocher’s Aufsätze* is the name of Walser’s first little book (1904) that simulates compositions written in the hand of a pupil (Fritz). Insofar as this student-writer is already dead, this literature on the beginning of writing prevents any perspective on the development of its writer and insists on focusing, in its literal transmission, on this incipient moment.—Barthes writes of TW: “Many of TW’s compositions suggest, it has been said, the scrawls of children. The child is the *infans* who does not yet speak; but the child who conducts TW’s hand already writes—he is a schoolboy.” (164) But this is not the imaginary child of Walser who refrains from painting when he should write; rather it is the hand of the painter drawing the strokes the way a child paints his first letters, laboriously observing the lines, coordinating their arrangement in space in order, ultimately, to compare his own awkwardly drawn letters with the models in his workbook.

16 Transcribed in: Robert Walser: *Aus dem Bleistiftgebiet*. Vol. 4, 196 [“*Die Worte, die ich hier aussprechen will haben einen eigenen Willen.*”].

after Walser finished another text with a pointed (or harder) pencil; we're dealing, then, with the second visible block of text that is recognizably offset and displays a thinner, lighter pencil stroke.¹⁷ The first words have been crossed out, and then come "The Words [*Die Worte*]"—literally—as if Walser couldn't think of anything else to write besides "Words" (ill. 2.2). A conceivably uninspired beginning—if it weren't for the fact that Walser's aesthetic program of beginnings lay precisely in this undemanding nature.

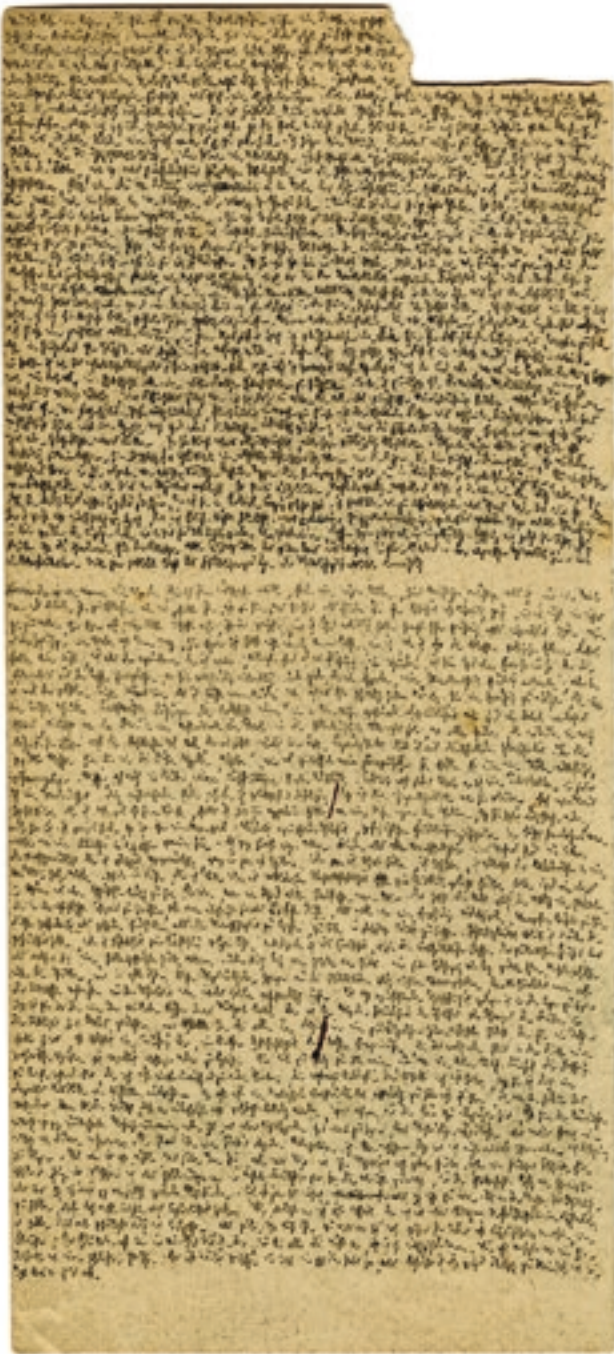
Twombly seems to function in an almost opposite manner: As a result, the actual reference of his writing remains the surface—all of it. The surface is the book of writing, one could metaphorically say, and with TW's writing in its unspecified totality—as *if the totality (of nature) had already been expressed in it*—Twombly's pictures are evocative in their flatness:

When writing bears down, explodes, pushes toward the margins, it rejoins the idea of the Book. The Book which is potentially present in TW's work is the old Book, the annotated Book: a super-added word invades the margins, the interlinea: this is the gloss. (162)

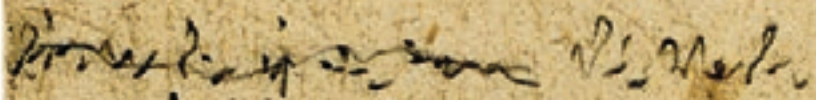
Should one desire to bring together this "struggle" between image and text in a discursive intersection evoked by TW's painting via Walser's imagination, it becomes clear how little one is dealing here with a victory or defeat of either art form. Rather, the two are both processing an occidental history of creativity in an attempt at circumventing the *ingenium* as *ineffabile*¹⁸: Creation emerges in the invocation of non-creativity, in (apparently) commonplace things, in the image (where text is written), in the naked surface (as potentiality), in the concealment of art. The author's fright: the white, blank, clean, unwritten page. The painter's fright: that all is already said with the blank canvas. In Walser's imagination, the blank page is for that reason already a richness into which text needs only to flow. He goes about his work subtly, that is, in secret, because he

17 Vis-à-vis the prominent vertical strokes in the text 12/2, we may be dealing here with Walser's marks in ink, perhaps to aid in orienting oneself after a pause in writing. Correspondingly, one could speak of the self-marking of writing that cultivates its text somewhere between micrographic notation and transcription in two distinct figurations (microgram and manuscript).

18 On this phrase, cf. Günter Blumberger: *Das Geheimnis des Schöpferischen oder: Ingenium est ineffabile? Studien zur Literaturgeschichte der Kreativität zwischen Goethezeit und Moderne*. Stuttgart 1991.



2.1 Robert Walser: Microgram No. 12, June/July 1927, Bern, Robert Walser Archive (full-scale)



2.2 Detail from ill. 1, Microgram No. 12, 1927, excerpt magnified fivefold; recognizable at right: “*Die Worte*” (The Words), Bern, Robert Walser Archive

would otherwise be forced to admit that his text is omnipresent, that it covers the entire space of the page (micrographism). In other words, it would otherwise be a graffiti that in a convoluted and varied way would cause the background to disappear:

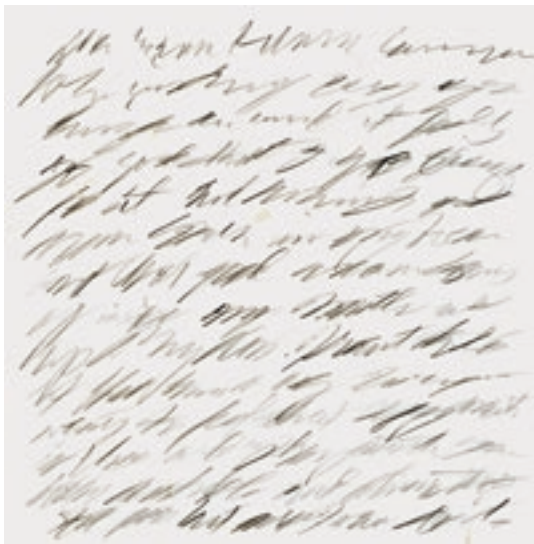
It is only a writer's paper which is white, which is “clean,” and that is not the least of his problems (Mallarmé's problem of the white page: often this whiteness, this blank provokes a panic: how to corrupt it?); the writer's misfortune, his difference (in relation to the painter, and especially to a painter of writing, like TW), is that he is forbidden graffiti: TW is, after all, a writer who has access to graffiti, with every justification and in sight of everyone. (167)

One comes to understand, then, that Cy Twombly is a painter whose images attain their poesy insofar as they allow painting to appear as a ground, a matrix, for text. At any moment, it could be a poem.

* * *

One can trace the casualness with which Twombly's works connote text (inasmuch as they are inscribed) back to the painter's basic graphic element, to his style or line (cf. ill. 1 and 3). In doing so, the line in painting enters into a precarious relationship to the image: While the line signifies the moment in a painting or drawing in which a mark is consummated or in which a difference is sketched in or emerges that was not previously there and that potentially will not be there later, the image emerges as an ensemble of lines in its totality in accordance with the notion of a mimesis of a schema or another totality in its place. Barthes diagnoses an idiosyncratic temporality of the line in TW's works:

Wax, a soft substance, adheres to the tiny asperities of the graphic field, and it is the trace of this light swarm of bees that constitutes TW's stroke, his line. An odd adherence, for it contradicts the very



3 Cy Twombly: *Letter of Resignation*, Rome, 1959–1967, No. XXXVI, lead pencil, oil-based house paint on paper, 25.1 × 25.4 cm, Private Collection

idea of adherence: it is like a contact of which the mere recollection would constitute the ultimate value; but this *past tense* of the stroke can also be defined as its *future*: the crayon, half soft, half pointed (we do not know how it will turn), is *going* to touch the paper: technically, TW's work seems to be conjugated in the past tense or in the future, never really in the present; one might say that there is never anything but the memory or the anticipation of the stroke: on the paper—on account of the paper—the tense is perpetually uncertain. (167–169)¹⁹

What does it mean when one must define the “past tense of the stroke [...] as its future”? By highlighting a “tense” that is “perpetually uncertain,”²⁰

19 “[T]his *past tense* of the stroke”: The rhetorically paradoxical stroke of the sentence lies precisely in the fact that *passé* (past) and *avenir* (future) are simultaneously consummated and/or revoked in the figure of the *trait*. With this in mind, *passé* is that which occurs when the *trait* passes by (does not arrive) while the *trait* that arrives opens up the future (*avenir*).

20 Uncertainty is accompanied by the risk of defining the stroke as something between a successful, completed act and an unsuccessful destruction of the aura

Barthes seems to want to emphasize that TW's line achieves its own virtuosity in an imperfection that one can either read as a "no more" or "not yet" of a something that is more ideal. Correspondingly, the line on the canvas is preserved not as a line but rather more as an intention or view of a line. This, however, can mean nothing other than that we see nothing but the line without being able to attribute any kind of significance to it—that of a represented body, for example:

The line—any line inscribed on the sheet of paper—denies the *important body*, the fleshly body, the humoral body; the line gives access neither to the skin nor to the mucous membranes; what it expresses is the body insofar as the line scratches, brushes over (one can go so far as to say: tickles); by the line, art *displaces itself*; its center is no longer the object of desire (the splendid body frozen in marble), but the subject of this desire: the line, however supple, light, or uncertain it may be, always refers to a force, to a direction; it is an *energon*, a labor which reveals—which makes legible—the trace of its pulsion and its expenditure. The line is a visible action. (170)²¹

This is why "TW's line is inimitable (try to imitate it: what you will make will be neither his nor yours: it will be: *nothing*). Now what is ultimately inimitable is the body" (170). If one chooses to underline this point about doubled inimitability, one will see how TW's line is nothing other than a re-marking of the body in its unmistakable actuality—and, one must thus add, perhaps also in regard to its potential salvation. This consideration of salvation, which allows the "individual" body to participate in life in

of a matrix (canvas): "TW seems to proceed in the manner of certain Chinese painters who must triumph over the line, the form, the figure, at the first stroke, without being able to correct themselves, by reason of the fragility of the paper, of the silk: this is painting *alla prima*." (174)

21 As nothing more than a "visible action," TW's line can do nothing other than to "deposit" the brush or pencil upon the imperfections of the paper—in which case it only serves to render that which is there visible: "There exists what we might call a sublime form of what is drawn, sublime because stripped of any scribbling, any lesion: the drawing instrument (brush, crayon, or pencil) descends on the sheet, makes contact—or hardens—there, that is all: there is not even the shadow of an incision, simply a *touch*: to the quasi-Oriental rarefaction of the slightly soiled surface (this is what the *object* is) corresponds the extenuation of the movement: it grasps nothing, it deposits, and all is said." (172)

all its metaphysical significance (however one refracts this theological or onto-theological idea of perfection into a Rousseauesque *perfectibilité* or neohumanistic development), explains why Twombly's line can serve in our society as a justification for a high value as a speculative commodity: "In our society, the tiniest graphic feature, provided it derive from this inimitable body, from this certain body, is worth millions. What is consumed (since it is a consumer society which concerns us here) is a body, an 'individuality'" (170). The line, however, does not permit itself to be merely conceived on a timeline between "no more" and "not yet" but rather first becomes visible at all insofar as it is at the disposal of the "indolence" of the drawing. As a drawing, it likewise stands between the "pure" graphism of writing (which appears to detach itself from the line) and the forceful dissolution of the line by the application of paint:

What seems to intervene in TW's line and to conduct it to the verge of that very mysterious dysgraphia which constitutes his entire art is a certain indolence (which is one of the purest of the body's signs). Indolence: this is precisely what enables "drawing," but not "painting" (any color released, left behind, is violent), or writing (each word is born whole, deliberate, armed by culture). (173)

While the inimitability of Twombly's "dysgraphia," as Barthes calls it, has often been commented upon and is one of the bromides of research, the implications of Barthes' thoughts for the systematic tableau have hardly been addressed. This is true even though Hubert Damisch dedicated a wonderful art historical treatise to studying the line, *Traité du trait*, which one could attach as a supplement to Barthes' "Non multa sed multum."²² Relative to painting and writing, one can move on from the line and examine "the discontinuous continuum for image and text," as the philosopher Ryosuke Ohashi described East Asian calligraphy.²³ The execution of calligraphy allows one to consider the smooth transition between the significance of writing and that of drawing or painting by virtue of the insistence of the writerly stroke resting on the graphic description of space—and the only instantaneous potentiality supports

22 Hubert Damisch: *Traité du trait: Tractatus tractus*. Exposition, Musée du Louvre, 26 April – 24 July 1995. Paris 1995. For a typographical perspective on the "stroke," cf. Gerrit Noordzij: *The Stroke: Theory of Writing* (1985). Trans. from Dutch by Peter Enneson. London 2005.

23 Ohashi: Introduction in: *Buchstaben der Welt* 2013, op. cit.

the notion of a continuum by adapting the conditions of writing (the fluid writing emerging from the line) to the spatial order of the image.²⁴

From here, it is only a small conceptual step to analyze the *trait* as “the element of formal difference which permits the contents (colored or sonorous substance) to appear.”²⁵ Formally, the *trait* can appear opposite text and image because the line itself embodies nothing (other than itself); it represents no content but probably sketches in the condition (by dint of a certain indolence) allowing a text to arise (one that is separable from the paper, which is to say quotable) or effacing the violence of the dispersion of color, *distraction*, traces. Conversely, if, like Barthes, one apprehends the *trait* as “visible action” (170), one can understand the pure sound (as semiological nucleus of language) and pure color (as the epitome of an “apparently structureless part,” according to DIN 5033²⁶) as phantasms that then emerge in the eyes and head of the viewer or reader once the attentiveness to the *trait* is withdrawn. To pure sound and color, the line counterposes distinction, structure, or action—that is, the transition from immobility (repose-in-itself) to movement. In French, *retracer*, “to present something pictorially” or “to bring to mind” is not at all far from *le retrait*, “the withdrawal.”²⁷

One can view Derrida's *Memoirs of the Blind*, a companion essay to a Louvre exhibition conceived by Derrida, even more clearly in the direction of a philosophy of the trait. Here, he speaks of the *puissance traçante*

24 On Twombly's place in the tradition of expressionist calligraphy, cf. Stemmrich 2009, 60–64.

25 Jacques Derrida: *Of Grammatology*. Trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Baltimore: 1997. On the line (*trait*) in Derrida cf. the author: Matrikel 2009, op. cit., ch. 2.1 (71–93).

26 DIN stands for Deutsches Institut für Normung, the German Institute for Standardization, which issues standards on a wide variety of products, including paint colors.

27 That the *trait* renders itself present and also withdraws, leads before one's eyes and also blots something out, can be considered to be a formalization of the imaginary line separating handwriting from the line of a drawing; it also suggests violence that can leave a mark or erase: “a weapon and a symptom, no doubt, as well as a cause” (Jacques Derrida: *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and other Ruins*. Trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. Chicago, 1993, 37). As the translators of the German edition note, *trait* not only means “trait” or “stroke” but also “arrow, dart.” (*Aufzeichnungen eines Blinden. Das Selbstporträt und andere Ruinen*. Ed. Michael Wetzel, trans. Andreas Knop and Michael Wetzel. Munich 1997, 41, fn. 50).

du trait, the “tracing potency of the trait,”²⁸ as an “originary, [facilitating] moment [...] at the instant when the point [the pen or paintbrush] at the point of the hand (of the body proper in general) moves forward [...] upon making contact with the surface [...].”²⁹ One can understand the Freudian notion of “facilitation” here as an interpretation of Derrida’s own idea of the trace from the *Grammatology*—in a sense, a “trace of the real” (Lacan) owing to a certain “inertia” (Barthes), drawing in (embodying) the line and thus remaining open to the potential violence of the painting and its *dispersion/distractio*n. A withdrawal (*retrait*)³⁰ exists within the facilitation, so that “the inscription of the inscribable is not seen.”³¹

28 The translation of *trait* varies [in German]. In his German translation of the word in Derrida’s *La vérité en peinture (Die Wahrheit in der Malerei)*, Michael Wetzel suggests a triple translation as “Strich/Zug/Einfall” (line/stroke/idea) in order to suggest the methodological, physiological-motoric, and phenomenological levels of the concept. Cf. Jacques Derrida: *Die Wahrheit in der Malerei*. Ed. by Peter Engelmann. From the French by Michael Wetzel. Vienna 1992, 18. In the translation of Jonathan Culler’s introduction to deconstruction, Manfred Momberger reproduces the range of meaning—following Culler’s demonstration of Derrida’s grafting language—in a series of concepts: “Line, trait, tie, stroke, outline, arrow, projection, trail, lead, trace” (Jonathan Culler: *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*. E-book. Ithaca, NY: 2008, 111).

29 Derrida: *Memoirs of the Blind*, op. cit., 44–45. [Brault/Naas provide the only English translation of *Memoirs of the Blind*. The French original uses the term *frayage*, which, in the Freudian literature, is translated as “facilitation”; Brault/Naas, however, translated *frayage* as “pathbreaking.” I have omitted “pathbreaking” and substituted “facilitating” so that Roussel’s subsequent comments make sense.—Daniel Mufson].

30 Derrida ascribed particular importance to the notion of *retrait* in the field of rhetoric, in which he (in the title of an essay) speaks of the *Retrait de la métaphore* and deploys the “rich [...] polysemy” of withdrawal as an interpretation of the dispersive power of metaphor. Regarding the rhetorical and phenomenological implications, cf. Philipp Stoellger: *Metapher und Lebenswelt. Hans Blumenbergs Metaphorologie als Lebenswelthermeneutik und ihr religionsphänomenologischer Horizont*. Tübingen 2000, 236–239. In *Memoirs of the Blind*, one speaks of the “rhetoric of the trait. For is it not the withdrawal (*retrait*) of the line—that which draws the line back, draws it again (*retire*), at the very moment when the trait is drawn, when it draws away (*se tire*) that which grants speech? And at the same time forbids separating drawing from the discursive murmur whose trembling transfixes it?” (56)

31 Derrida: *Memoirs of the Blind* 1993, op. cit., 45.

It [*le trait*] appears, or rather disappears, without delay. I will name it the withdrawal [*retrait*] or the eclipse, the differential inappearance of the trait. [...] [T]he divisibility of the trait here [interrupts] all pure identification and [forms] [...] our general hypothec for all thinking about drawing [which is] inaccessible in the end, at the limit, and de jure. [...] Nothing belongs to the trait, and thus, to drawing [...]. The trait joins and adjoins only in separating.³²

The *puissance traçante* Derrida describes in a peculiarly paradoxical construction consists in the power and impotency, empowerment and disempowerment of the graphic act; the power of the *trait* comes down to becoming almost invisible in the phenomenon of its potency vis-à-vis the imaginary qualities of the image or text: "writing instead of drawing, *trait pour trait*."³³ In the analytic regression to the line, one can see in this quasi-invisibility the production of a correspondence between text and image that appears in the Homeric motif of the blind author who, by writing, dramatizes his own absence. Blind, he nevertheless is "seeing" (like a "seer").³⁴

In an earlier, briefer text on Cy Twombly, "The Wisdom of Art," Barthes places Cy Twombly's art in proximity to such a "seeing" quality of text. As the writer's visionary quality as a blind person rests in the lingering of text, that is, in granting it independence in its own dissemination, the discovery of this lingering by Barthes/Twombly qualifies as a "secret" of the visual arts:

³² Ibid., 54.

³³ [The Brault/Naas English translation seems to vary from the German translation quoted by MR, so I have translated the quotation from the German. The location of the quote in Brault/Naas would seem to be p. 37.—Daniel Mufson.] Between the (writing) stroke and the (drawing) line, *trait pour trait*, the translator of the German edition notes: "The phrase *trait pour trait* means something like 'precisely, paying attention to every individual stroke'; *copier trait pour trait* means, then, 'to copy exactly.' As the American translator of *Mémoires d'Aveugles* notes, however, the phrase is also reminiscent of the biblical *œil pour œil, dent pour dent*—'eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth.' And, finally, *trait-pour-trait* also contains the portrait." (43, fn. 52)

³⁴ In the context of Plato's critique of writing, Derrida's discussion of Plato's Pharmacy, i.e., writing as "pharmakon" that, at the same time, serves as poison and cure, simultaneously increasing efficacy (in terms of memory) and weakening it (in terms of the power of recall). Cf. Jacques Derrida: *Platons Pharmazie*. In: id.: *Dissemination*. Ed. Peter Engelmann. Trans. Hans-Dieter Gondek. Vienna 1995, 69–192.

This art has its secret, which is in general not to flaunt substance (charcoal, ink, oil paint) but to *permit it to linger*. We might think that in order to express the pencil's character, it would have to be pressed hard, emphasized, made thick, black, intense. Twombly thinks the opposite: by withholding the pressure of substance, by letting it come to rest quite casually, so that its texture is somewhat scattered, matter will reveal its essence, grant us the certainty of its name: *this is pencil*. (178)

For Barthes, Twombly's art of the line nevertheless develops its actual effect primarily in the surface, and in the art of correlating the line and surface without negating the line in the image; one can view Twombly's actual accomplishment as a painter as a package. If the line is that which is necessarily withdrawn as a holistic ensemble of lines in the phantasm of the image, each of Twombly's lines insists on its own position on the surface, refusing to be subsumed to any rule, system, or structure:

And what is inaccessible on the level of the stroke is still more so on the level of the surface. In *Panorama* (1955; cf. p. 443, ill. 8), the entire space crackles like a television screen before any image is flashed on it; now I would not know how to get that irregularity of graphic distribution [...]. And from this I understand that Twombly's art is an incessant victory over the stupidity of all marks and lines: to make an *intelligent* stroke is ultimately what makes the painter different. (193)

But what does it mean to draw "an *intelligent* stroke" on the paper or canvas? The German word *Intelligenz*, like the French *intelligence*, retains the Latin roots *inter* (between) and *legere* (to read) and thus signifies a connection, a synthesis, or an understanding according to a structure. The intelligent stroke, then, pertains to the distribution of lines on the paper, and Barthes sees Twombly's line as evidently "intelligent" because of the "irregularity of graphic distribution," which is to say, insofar as the coated or inscribed surface resists being perceived as mere structure, unity, or comprehensible ensemble by virtue of the intelligence of its lines. Accordingly, Twombly's surface would be comprehensible as an ensemble of lines in their disparity.

Here, one should not forget that a stroke—that every stroke—is a "line inscribed on the sheet of paper" (170) and thus cultivates a relationship to the surface and to intelligence. *Le passé du trait*: This means the past that expresses itself in it, but also the passing by, the allowance of passing,

the passing along into its future. When the line thereby denies “the important body,” that is, “the fleshly body,” then it remains a “body, insofar as the line scratches, brushes over (one can go so far as to say: tickles).” (170) The line thus forms a corporeal tangent that shifts the present (the fleshly body) along the past and future body. What Twombly’s “intelligent strokes” thereby accomplishes by not causing the surface, structure, or text to disappear into the background lies in their unique relation to the surface that sustains it—that is, in their irregularity that *underlines* their individuality, which is to say that insists on their respectively specific expression.³⁵ All these strokes, then, appear not just to convey themselves or a statement or a preceding body but rather in order to demonstrate the absent rules, structure, or texture that the paper or canvas conveys as a surface. Twombly’s lines constitute a retreat of the pencil or brush stroke that defines the relation of inscription or drawing as a locus of drawing.³⁶ In the concept of retreat (*retrait*), *trait* and paper (*feuille*) are connected to one another: “The order of the sheet of paper,” Derrida notes in a 1997 interview with the *Cahiers de médiologie*,

will thus, under the tile of living on (*survivance*), extend the survival (*survie*) of the paper—far beyond its disappearance or retreat (*retrait*).

I prefer to speak of its retreat (*retrait*); this can mark the border of a structural, even structuring and modeling, hegemony without requiring a death of the paper—just a *reduction*.³⁷

35 In “the poet names written by Twombly,” for example, “[to] discover only an ‘empty idea’ (Barthes) from this intellect [the poet]” (Stemmerich 2009, 73 f.), describes by way of contrast only the formal side of the line, and that also means the handwriting that is always concrete and individual based on its appearance but is a tangent, a touching displacement between past and future based on its form.

36 “In an early text from 1951, Charles Olsen, the director of Black Mountain College, was already emphatically describing Twombly as a ‘man who dealt with whiteness’” (Achim Hochdörfer: “Blue goes out, B comes in”. Cy Twombly’s Narration der Unbestimmtheit. In: Vienna 2009, 12–36, here 14). “With this in mind, the whiteness in a picture such as *Academy* (1955) does not constitute the background for the marks that are set down; rather, it is itself an active greatness” (ibid., 27).

37 Jacques Derrida: *Das Papier oder ich, wissen Sie... (Neue Spekulationen über einen Luxus der Armen)*. In: id.: *Maschinen Papier. Das Schreibmaschinenband und andere Antworten* (2001). Trans. Markus Sedlaczek. Ed. Peter Engelmann. Vienna 2006, 221–249, here 227.

This “*reduction*,” “without requiring a death of the paper,” can accordingly forestall, by virtue of the writing on the pages of the painter of text, the interpretation of the text as a reference to the image or surface or of the image as a reference to its inscription as an emblematic relation of the commentary or as a commentary, extension, or definition of the text in relation to the image.³⁸ Rather, in the stroke as *retrait*, the end of a reciprocal hegemonization is intended in the relation between text and image: As writing, Twombly’s strokes, in all that they say and in the future in which they will be speaking, contribute to the contemplation of the history of the blank surface. Twombly’s writing is also a locus of reflection about the painter of text.

ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

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1 © Cy Twombly Foundation. Courtesy Archives Nicola Del Roscio.

2.1-2.2 Keystone / Robert Walser Foundation / Photo: STR.

3 © Cy Twombly Foundation. Courtesy Cy Twombly Foundation.

38 And this includes the painter or painter of writing as the subject of the “visible action,” as Barthes describes the line: “Meurs et devient,” writes Philippe Sollers in his analysis of Cy Twombly’s language and letter games (the name TwOMBly, for example): One should translate the French as “I die and I become,” but Sollers forgets the “I” so that dying (the past) and what is to come (the future) are to be thought of in terms of Twombly’s implementation. (Philippe Sollers: *Les épiphanies de Twombly*. In: YL VII, 7–10, here 10).

V. TRACES OF LIFE

If you see a painting that's always coherent from beginning to end, it's something far away from the main preoccupations or the character of the person, that's all. As much as you'd like to get away from yourself you never do.

Cy Twombly, 2007



1 Cy Twombly: *Untitled (Family Portrait)* or *Untitled (Portrait: Herr Dr. Reiner Speck)*, Bassano in Teverina, June 1979, collage: (drawing paper, transparent adhesive tape), oil paint, wax crayon, lead pencil on drawing card, 120 x 149 cm, Cologne, Collection Prof. Dr. Reiner Speck

REINER SPECK

TWOMBLY'S LAURA

... I find myself in a position where one must fear that the things one would most wish to say ... can suddenly no longer be said. Marcel Proust, Contre Sainte-Beuve

One of my first essays, published when I was a young doctor in the early 1970s, was on the works of Cy Twombly (ill. 1), then an artist known only to a relatively small circle and a long way from his later worldwide fame; it appeared in the culture section of the *Deutsches Ärzteblatt*. I had set at its head as epigraph a sentence from Adorno's aesthetic theory: "Works of art are incomparably much less the image and property of the artist than is supposed by a doctor who knows the artist solely from the couch. In art only dilettantes rely on the unconscious for everything." That was at the time intended just as a warning not to be too quick to use the vocabulary of psychoanalysis, 'free association', or 'childlike syncretism' when approaching the essentially unique work of a contemporary artist whose paintings and drawings so teem with scribbles, hieroglyphs, palimpsests, cryptograms, words, and names, fragments that allude to lines of poetry from every possible epoch, to ancient mythologies, or historical events. No exhortation seems more apt as an imperative for interpreting these 'private ejaculations' (thus the title of a work by Cy Twombly, alluding to the 1633 anthology of the English poet George Herbert) than the statement by the conceptual artist Lawrence Weiner, "Learn to read art." But, a long time previously, Edgar Wind had already observed that, "The eye reads differently when it is guided by thought."

The highpoint, for now, in the paradigm shift in how Twombly's oeuvre is viewed, which has gradually broadened from an intuitive way of looking and the enthusiastic gushing that arose from it, via stylistic and comparative studies, through to the specific exploration of the termini deployed, can be found in the interdisciplinary Morphomata conference dedicated to the artist a short time after his death. The

strictly scholarly, but not for that reason any less reverent approach at times raised the lofty interpretive orbit even to the cloud-girt heights of Olympus, yet it was still possible for a contemporary witness and early collector of Twombly to complete these academic reflections through his living, if fragmentary, recollection of the origin and titling of some works. This contribution to the discussion will be recapitulated here. It does not aim to question the apodictic findings of the art historians, archaeologists, and literary scholars, but only to supplement them with the anecdotes of a collector.

The first encounters with the work of Cy Twombly, studio visits, walks through Rome, or languorous afternoon entertainments in the Campagna, brought the young, shyly reserved collector much knowledge, though its particles first had to settle before, in a sense of irrepressible exaltation, he too could name them in a phrase that accurately glosses a feeling of happiness which has now lasted almost half a century: *Et ego in Arcadia*. What had led me there was an unsigned picture from 1957/58, around 70 × 100 cm in size, which was exhibited in the Galerie Tartaruga in Rome, and had been acquired by me from the Galerie Zwirner in Cologne (ill. 2). To have this work finally dated and signed by the artist himself, we drove to Rome and met the artist—with the piece in makeshift packing under my arm—in front of his house in the Via Monserrato, not far from the Palazzo Farnese. The following day we were invited to lunch. With a black attendant dressed very formally in white, and the blinds blocking the sun behind us in the high-ceilinged rooms of the palazzo apartment, it recalled Twombly's native Virginia more than the home of an artist in Rome. Unexpectedly, the young medical couple from Germany at first learned more about the family of the artist's wife (born a Baroness Franchetti and a relative of Lenbach) and some of his Roman acquaintances than about his art. His pictures stood stacked facing the wall, and were only briefly lifted up or turned around, and then quickly hidden again with a smile—as if they had to be guarded from any more light and kept hidden from curious (or covetous) eyes. All that was exposed to view, in fact, were the ancient sculptures that stood in the axis of the suites of rooms. In the artist's other houses and workplaces, to which we were later invited in various places in Italy, in the Dolomites, in Bassano, or in Gaeta, the rooms were likewise dominated by Roman statues and choice Renaissance objects as adornments. Only later would we realize how indispensable these biographical backgrounds are—the marriage of the young American, who had stayed behind in Rome after a kind of Grand Tour, to an Italian aristocrat (the 'Venere Franchetti' of



2 Cy Twombly: *Untitled*, Rome, 1957, oil-based house paint, lead pencil, wax crayon, paper stuck on canvas, 70 × 100 cm, Cologne, Collection Prof. Dr. Reiner Speck

his pictures), whose family were once owners of the Ca' d'Oro on the Canal Grande—for the understanding of Twombly's work.

There can hardly be any iconography of a twentieth-century artist that assumes so much familiarity and contextual knowledge of classical antiquity as that of Cy Twombly. The lofty interpretations of outsiders may be compared and accompanied by the view and recollection of friends: the genesis and final completion of a work of art are each exposed to different forms of exegesis. The small distance in time that now elapses between the circulation, recognition, and interpretation of works of contemporary art should prompt an acknowledgement, in the context of art-historical appraisal, of the living contemporary witness of collectors.

Twombly's picture *Portrait: Herr Dr. Reiner Speck* of 1979, which will be the focus of the following recollections of meeting the artist, has tempted many visitors to my collection into writing about it (cf. ill. 1). My communications on the history of its origin, on the backgrounds to its symbols and names, on its artistic means, indeed on the question of why this work is titled "Portrait", have been used by many interpreters to introduce a new context to their iconography of the works of this in many ways enigmatic artist. Thus the late Peter Ludwig used what I had told of it, almost word for word, as the outline for his opening remarks at the exhibition of the Speck Collection in the Museum Ludwig in Cologne, where he wrote, almost with resignation, that the further interpretation of the picture would require an advanced reading...¹ And the art historian Katrin Fischer-Junghölder years later wrote an essay *Konstellationen – Namen – Signaturen: Zur Ästhetik des Vexierspiels bei Marcel Proust und Cy Twombly* in which—referring to both their working methods—it is said: "What is probably Proust's most deft aesthetic innovation is to visualize temporally anachronistic and materially heterogeneous elements of experience and memory simultaneously upon a surface imagined as a tableau, but not without repeatedly stressing the transience of these constellations."² The interchangeability of the names and methods is evident. The similarities in their artistic method are further deepened with regard to the finished portrait when we read: "like the painter Elstir in Proust's *Recherche*, Twombly withdraws things from their traditional, logical order, so that he can set them in a perspective which, as it were,

1 Sammlung Speck (Ex. cat. Museum Ludwig), ed. by Alfred M. Fischer and Barbara M. Thiemann. Cologne 1996, 11–13.

2 Proustiana XXVI, Insel Verlag, Berlin 2010, 48–59, here 50.

initiates the constellation and confers meaning on it, but without thereby ruling out other types of possible reference.”³

But what are the subject and construct of this “portrait”? The origins lie in Bassano in Teverina, not far from the park of Bomarzo, where the artist for years maintained a large Renaissance building as his studio and summer residence. Here Cy Twombly made a habit of inviting select persons who had become close to him through his art to visit and even to stay. We, that is my wife Gisela and my daughter Laura, but also our dobermann, called Orpheus, were among these happy few in the sixties of the last century, and we stayed in those large rooms through whose half-opened doors the bust of a Roman general could be seen; for in Bassano, too, classical antiquity, in vestiges and spolia that had been gathered there, was everywhere present. In photographs by the artist exhibited a decade later by Lothar Schirmer in Munich, the artist has with the camera exactly matched the gaze of the then early visitor (ill. 3). And the objects, made of weathered wood or rusty iron, which were then still lying around in the lower rooms unordered and unshaped, would all later be recognizable in the artist's whitewashed sculptures and inscribed bronze casts.

In the midday heat, the company spread itself around the house, tower, and green inner courtyard: we read or slept, listened to music, or tended flowers. Our dog was kept quiet with a bone and our three-year-old daughter with paper and coloring pencil—but all in a strange intensity, for we knew that the Master was sitting in a worn linen director's chair, seemingly distracted in front of one of his giant canvases; in the corner of the studio a transistor radio was playing the entertainment program of AFN Italy, on the floor and tables, scattered among collections of paintbrushes, pieces of paraffin crayons, and pots of paint, lay well-thumbed reference works—mostly English-language lexica on ancient names, poems, mythologies. Was that the place, were these the circumstances in which such a great, mysterious, aesthetically complete art with such sublime themes was created, which a few years later would be seen in the great museums of the world, right up to the Louvre? Only my captivated admiration outweighed a certain awestruck frisson.

“That evening we read no more...”—so I am tempted to continue, such an impression is still made by the memory of that meal, set for around 9 pm, at which we were the only guests. The old local servant

3 Proustiana XXVI, op. cit., 58.



3 Cy Twombly: *Interior, Bassano in Teverina*, 1980, 43.1 × 27.9 cm, dry-print on cardboard, Collection Prof. Dr. Reiner Speck

brought food and drink prepared by Tatja Twombly, and we talked about the Italians, about medicine, about what we had read that day. Among the usual digressions the host brought the conversation back again and again to my favorite writer, the kind of music I liked, and asked me, almost inquisitorially, about my favorite places and numbers, until it suddenly became clear to me that he had presented me with a kind of questionnaire in the spirit of Proust, though why, I had no idea. I naively took it to be the continuation of a parlor game, originally English, that was also conducted in late nineteenth-century France. We have it to thank—because Proust in his youth filled out two of them—for essential statements of Proust's preferences and wishes. And since the discovery of these records in 1924, every biography of the great French writer has circled around this document.

The following day the reason for the questioning became clear to us, for the answer, in the form of a large-scale work on paper, lay on the studio floor. On a closer look, I discovered two of the sheets that my daughter had scribbled upon the previous day, which Twombly had let her have, supposedly as a diverting activity with colored pencils. They were now harmoniously included in collage on the sheet—like an authentic record by a family member, and not without ironic reference to the comparisons, at the time not infrequently made by experts, of Twombly's art to children's scribbling. After a quick and erratic 'reading' of the work, I recognized—accentuated in different ways by the artist—my favorite numbers, colors, places, composers, and writers. On looking closer the ranking seemed to have been determined rather more by the artist than by the subject of the portrait. The implied answers to the catalog of questions did relate to the things, places, and people that had been mentioned, in some cases only briefly, but their artistic realization was done in a way that was entirely typical, both metaphorically and stylistically, of Twombly's painting style. Thus, from my point of view, the admiring mention I had made the day before of the indeed fascinating figure of the child-murderer Gilles de Rais did not, as one might suppose, concern this character himself, but rather the sensitive and skillful literary description of his misdeeds by Georges Bataille which I had just read.

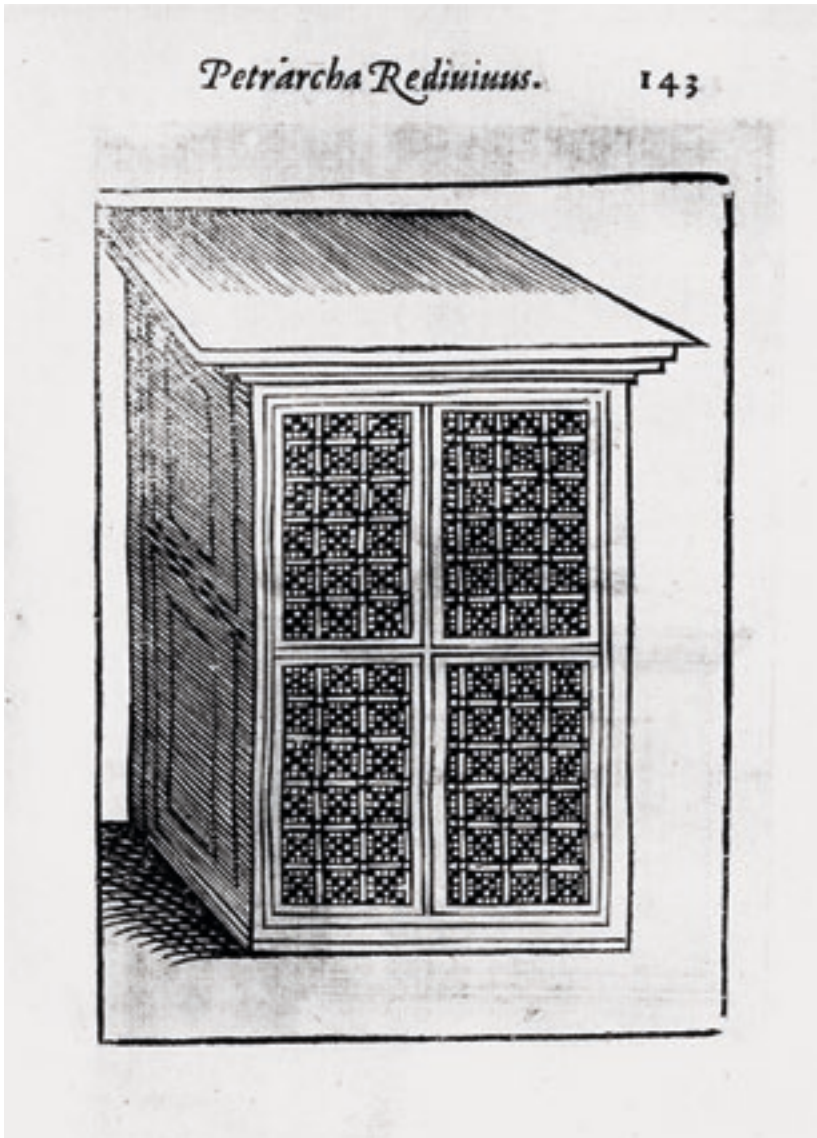
The proper names of the members of the family were set in capitals, and in many of the letters the 'Hellenization' practiced by the artist since the 1960s can be seen: the capital A—be it that the artist was engaged in a historical hagiography, or a disguised personal adoration—is executed like a delta in which the base of the triangular configuration, above all in "PetRARCA POETA LAUREATUS", is in most cases accentuated with

several lines, as if a kind of foundation (‘Δ’) upon which rests the fame of the figure thus named. Alongside the mention, in script executed rather *en passant*, of beloved composers like Chopin or Brahms, the treatment of Marcel Proust and Francesco Petrarca stands out, writers who, already in the year in which the work was created, were focuses of my library, which today ranks as the largest privately owned library dedicated to these authors anywhere in the world. The conversation had returned, unforced, to Proust and Petrarch again and again, though in the picture the involvement of the French writer seems to slip into the background compared to the Italian one: although in the center of the composition, Proust is only hinted at by the initials “M.P.”: no less reserved and cryptic than the creator of the picture himself, who signed it with “C.T.”—and did so immediately under the child’s scribbles which had been included and surrounded specially by lines.

The accentuation and graphic treatment given to Francesco Petrarca was all the stronger in that Umbrian-Tuscan location where the work was created: and not only as a person and as a predecessor of the Renaissance who had himself owned a large collection of manuscripts, but also as the poet of the *Canzoniere*. The square *signum*, crossed by horizontal and vertical strokes, stands for a bookcase, as the artist had hinted in conversation, the historically transmitted book-container open to light and air which even today can be seen in the Casa Petrarca in Arquà (ill. 4). Cy Twombly knew it from the 1635 book, edited by Giacomo Filippo Tomasini, on the poet’s life and work, *Petrarca redivivus*, which I had once brought with me to Rome. As a gift for my hosts I tried whenever possible to give the original edition of a book that met our shared interest: in this way, from the bibliophilic admirer of his art in which the written word plays such a great role, as well as signed copies of *Finnegans Wake*, or Proust’s *Swann*, or Schwitter’s *Anna Blume*, among much else, Leonardo’s treatise on painting, too, and an early edition of Theocritus found their way onto the artist’s bookshelf. This may give a clue for the interpretation of the multiply struck through “EX LIBRIS”: the collector possesses a total of 10 designs for a bookplate that Twombly created for him in the 1970s.⁴

The artist knew Petrarch’s work well, and prized the onomatopoeic elegance and oxymorons in his poems on the life and death of the adored Madonna Laura. Through nuances in the style of writing, or better painting,

4 Cf. Sammlung Speck 1996, op. cit., p. 301, no. 709 and ill. on p. 312.



4 Petrarch's bookcase, from: Giacomo Filippo Tomasini:
Petrarca redivivus, Padua 1635, fol. 143

'C.T.' re-enacts the sound-painting games of the poet crowned with laurels on the 'Capitol', the *Poeta laureatus*, and so leads the viewer to readings such as 'Laura', '*l'aura*', '*lauro*', etc.

In the same way in which the artist often seemed to paint—a book in his left hand and a piece of chalk in his right—so should the viewer, too, look at and interpret his paintings. More pragmatically than the person who is both discussant and discussed here, the art historian cited above put it thus: "The viewer experiences in self-observation that he, under the obligation to make sense of it, again and again draws upon his own store of knowledge and experience, in order to undertake contextualizations that could elucidate Twombly's choice of forms and arrangement of the composition. By the fact that this process turns into an interlocking puzzle, Twombly indirectly deconstructs not only the context of the references of iconic and written signs and the idea of their legibility, but also reflects upon the communicative possibilities of the image as artistic medium, which is necessarily embedded in a communicative context, and always already exhibits appellative structures in its constitution as a work of art."⁵

And so what has been recounted here, in posthumous homage to the artist, must for now remain a fragment; were it continued, it would turn out differently. Ultimately Cy Twombly himself executed a courteously ironic, indeed Anglo-American, exaltation, through the titles and form of address of the portrait's subject. The apparently nonchalant exploration during the preceding evening meal was, looking back, probably a first 'sitting', and corresponded to the beady observation of the portrait-painter studying the physiognomy and posture of his subject. Twombly, by synaesthetically 'writing down' the answers to the Proustian questionnaire given the night before by the person portrayed, revealed his own affinities to and readings in what had been communicated: every portrait by an artist is always a self-portrait too.

5 Proustiana XXVI, op. cit., 52.

ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

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Del Roscio.

4 from: *Petrarca 1304–1374. Werk und Wirkung im Spiegel der Biblioteca
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2004, 284.



Cy Twombly, with Nicola Del Roscio on his right in Venice,
Piazza San Marco, 1970s

NICOLA DEL ROSCIO

TRIP TO RUSSIA AND AFGHANISTAN WITH CY TWOMBLY, 1979

I cannot remember how it came up, but one of Cy's friends or perhaps he himself read a book titled *A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush* by Eric Newby. Passing the book to each other we all became very excited. The book is one of the most adventurous descriptions of Afghanistan: the medieval atmosphere that transpires on every page, the valleys inhabited by bandits, the food, the accidental meeting with the famous explorer Thesiger. So, we left for the trip to Afghanistan via Russia and Central Asia with a group of friends, mostly Sicilians, not new to this kind of trip in Asia, who organized the logistics of the journey. They were also full of humor and it did not matter if we were caught in the middle of a disaster; at six o'clock p.m. they organized a cocktail meeting before dinner, all cleaned from dust, well dressed and peppy conversation.

We first landed in Moscow, where *The Perils of Pauline* began, never ending till we landed back in Rome, as Cy commented on our trip at the end.

One of the Sicilians in our group of ten, the son of a prominent public figure in Palermo, was very intellectually à la mode for the period, revealing at every moment his communist beliefs. At the airport in Moscow, ready for the inspection of our bags we had Marlboro cigarettes already prepared for the guards to grab with smiles of delight. But the Sicilian had some extreme communist newspapers, a book of Foucault in his hands, and no cigarettes in his bag. The guards, who at the time looked to us like peasants, were disappointed; they picked up the *Lotta Continua* newspapers, trying to read them in Italian with comical results, and when they got to the book by Foucault, literally jumped up in the air, trying to impress each other by reading very loudly the descriptions on the back of the book, which mentioned sexuality.

In a split second, tens of unpleasant older officers appeared, repeating in a mix of surprise and irritation the word "Sexualitat". The incident

ended after some hours of anxiety and a meticulous check of all our bags. We had to sit being quizzed in a squalid office whose peeling walls were painted light green. Finally on our arrival at the hotel Russia, we were comforted with great quantities of caviar, smoked fish and wonderful borscht.

On visiting the Shchukin and Morozov collection in the Pushkin Museum, Cy was amazed by the quality of the collection, but at a same time he complained about the security of the rooms and the high risk of fire.

After a couple of days, leaving for Tashkent, Samarkand, and Bukhara, we got stuck at the airport of Moscow for seven hours, due to a plane delay, where we witnessed scenes from Gustave Doré's illustrations of the *Divina Commedia*. In the huge airport, an immense crowd sat, ate, discussed, and waited—it was my first experience of a globalized world: so many races, shapes, behaviors, that I never dreamed of before. All races were there, they seemed like an evacuating crowd from some sort of disaster. I was impressed by a Cuban arguing bossily with the personnel of the airport, by the woman custodian cooking food on a portable kitchenette in the toilettes in full view of men pissing, children next to adults, smells of different sorts, and everything enveloped by beautiful walls coated in white tiles. Now and then the woman would scream something, without raising her eyes.

We were left to ourselves. In answer to our impatient inquiries about the delay, our guide would tell us in an arrogant way to stop asking, because according to him if we had left by train the trip would have lasted days. So, exasperated and bored after the first five or six hours of stupor in the airport hall, Cy and I decided to go outside to look at the sky and the clouds. To our surprise, the guards let us go out with just an annoyed wink. We went through a hole in the metal perimeter grid and found ourselves in the military part of the airport. The biggest airplane ever built was sitting there, unguarded: a Tupolev plane that later collapsed in an air show at Le Bourget in Paris. We became worried at our impertinence and rushed back to the waiting room, but something comical and surreal happened: we saw on the other side of the glass corridor our tour guide, gesticulating in an upset way: we understood that we were missing the plane. Panicked, we started to run to get to the departure lounge but we could not find the door. Out of the blue a person that Cy knew appeared from a group of people that just disembarked and called Cy, then started running with us in a circle, asking frivolous questions and passing in front of some guards who, surprised at our stupidity, did not know how to react.

After several comic passages in front of the police control, one of the guards literally took us by the arm and dragged us to the departing plane. At the stairs of the aircraft we had to face humiliating looks as the

guards pushed the Russians crowd aside and made us get inside before them. The plane had no pressurization and we all had pain in the ears for months after. Next to me sat a Central Asian young man who had just finished his military service. He offered me a green banana, so sour that I had to think how to spit it out without offending him; meanwhile he was eating it with delight smiling at me. I thought to be nice to him and stupidly showed him the page of a weekly Italian magazine with a beautiful actress in bikini. The poor young man was offended and became definitely hostile, turning his face away from me for the rest of the trip.

Tashkent was the door to Muslim Soviet Central Asia, where sovietization had erased all colors, that color of life that later we saw in Afghanistan, by painting a superficial color of sadness on the daily life and to the great monuments of Samarkand and Bukhara. Cy was impressed by the architecture of the necropolis in Bukhara that Russians were restoring very well.

He was upset by an episode that happened in the plane from Tashkent to Bukhara: we had a guide, the kind that during that time in Russia was assigned to foreign visitors as both guide and policeman. Our Sicilian group, mostly wonderful people, were intolerant of the restrictions and banality imposed by our guide/policeman. The one who had caused us the delay on our arrival in Moscow because of his Foucault book sat in the plane next to a monumental Russian woman, a music performer. Questioned by her, he lamented about our guide/policeman. The next morning our guide came with tears to the breakfast room and asked us how we could be so mean as to report him to the secret police. The poor man, whom before we disliked, became our mascot and Cy wrote a wonderful letter that we all signed, witnessing that we were very happy with his work. The Sicilian reader of Foucault became for the rest of the trip the scapegoat who was blamed for all our bad moments.

We arrived in Kabul: it was a Paradise of life going on simultaneously on different levels at the same moment, like two movies intersecting and going at fast speed: colors, rugs in colors, mad traffic, dust, donkeys and carts, piles of vegetables and fruits sprinkled with water drops like diamonds trembling in the rays of the sun, walking burqa like paper puppets in a Mexican fiesta and, as a cherry on the pie, a monkey on a leash outside a carpenter's shop, trying to be naughty with a chicken with the plucked behind. After Russia, Afghanistan was a liberation and we finally had some aesthetic pleasure without guilt or remorse.

Suddenly, what first appeared to be mannequins hanging and dangling from trees on the side street, after a while came into view as dangling

bodies. Under those trees were Central Asian-looking soldiers, in couples, holding each others' little finger and in the other hand a rifle with a flower stuck in the gun hole. They were the advance-guard of the soviet invasion. The soldiers smiled at us when they saw the bus with westerners stupefied and excited like chickens, and acted coquettishly as if proud of the scene. Thinking back to the scene of the soviet Uzbek soldiers with flowers stuck in the guns' holes, Cy must have remembered and used the image for his sculptures as a humorous, sad, sarcastic and cynical episode (ill. 1). Thank God we did not witness any other such scenes, and slowly it became doubtful in our memory that we really had seen hanged people.

Our first visit was in Kabul, the tomb of Babur. Cy later dedicated a sculpture to him, impressed by the beauty and serenity of his tomb and out of admiration for him and his *Baburama* book of memoirs (ill. 2). We also went to visit Herat. I had the impression that Cy considered the trip to the remains of the ramparts of the castle of Alexander the Great as a pilgrimage, a homage to the entire story of Alexander. Many years after he dedicated a sculpture to that trip and titled it *Herat*, I suspect, among other things, to make up for the loss of the castle of Alexander, destroyed by Russian bombs (ill. 3).

We settled finally to go to Nuristan. On the way from Kabul to Jalalabad we travelled on mountain roads with deep ravines and many trucks and buses precipitated at the bottom, the sites where the English invading army was annihilated in the nineteenth century. Afterwards, we entered a fertile green valley of poppy fields: carpets of little heads of different colors (white, red, pink) waving on thin stems. One can see where Cy got the impression and the emotion, when he later used the poppy symbol in his sculptures (ill. 4). Passing through the valley of infinite poppies, the donkey road was flanked and infested by very tall plants of marijuana. They were so overpowering that on slamming the doors of the jeep they got caught in the mechanisms of the doors; it was amusing to repel them with feet and hands, among giggles, funny remarks and innuendos.

The poppy fields were attended by young women whose beautiful faces with green eyes appeared to us as a sudden revelation, as we to them, in our unexpected invasion of their intimacy. In fact we surprised them in the moment they relieved their bodies of the burqa from the sweating of their work. We had the impression that we appeared to them like Acteon to Diana bathing, and they were as irritated and swearing as Diana.

We passed by village castles, built in mud, straw and donkey's manure, with dung splashed on the walls like omelets, to be burned as winter



1 Cy Twombly: *Untitled*, Gaeta, 1990, wood, cloth and plastic tulip flowers, wire, clay, white paint, 167 × 35 × 35 cm, Private Collection



2 Cy Twombly: *Untitled ("In Memory of Babur")*, Lexington, 2000, wood, plaster, white paint, lead pencil, putty, $76 \times 54.8 \times 35.2$ cm, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich, Udo and Anette Brandhorst Foundation, Museum Brandhorst



3 Cy Twombly: *Herat, Gaeta*, 1998, wood, acrylic, 37 × 36 × 27,5 cm, Private Collection



4 Cy Twombly: *Untitled*, Rome, 1987, bronze painted with white oil-base paint, 194 × 31 × 79 cm, edition of six, Private Collection



5 Cy Twombly: *Untitled*, Jupiter Island, December 1991, wood, plaster, 48,2 × 33,6 × 44,7 cm, Houston, The Menil Collection, Cy Twombly Gallery

fuel (ill. 5). A serene creek of clear water, where children threw stones, crossed patches of almond trees, on one side, and opposite a cemetery with tombs typical of Afghanistan, evocative saddle-shapes whose images Cy used in some of his sculptures (*In Memory of Babur* in the Brandhorst Museum, cf. ill. 2).

We stopped for drinks at villages where even the sheep were drugged out of their mind. Villagers with swollen red eye-balls came to sell us an eagle. We were lounging sipping tea on beds (I should call them ottomans), lined up in the piazza, watching beautiful ridges of blue mountains on the other side of the valley, like the convalescence of people at the beginning of the century at Davos, in Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain*. An increasing crowd of drunken, drugged young men came to stare at the blond Sicilian girl sprawled on the sofa, with her voluptuous shape in full view. Everybody was busy in an amazed conversation, until eagle-eyed Cy made us aware of the dangerousness of the local looks at the sexy appearance of the blond girl, and we hurried back to the Jeep.

Finally we arrived in Nuristan, first a narrow valley and then mountains. It was the last valley of Afghanistan, still pagan a hundred years before, changing the name from Kafirstan but still making wine secretly as in the Greek mythology which placed Dionysus there, bringing wine-making with him to the west. People whispered to us of secret festivals, based on wine drinking. In fact the vines were no longer cultivated but grew spontaneously, climbing trees near a loop of a fierce river with tumbling waters from the Pamir Mountains. The grape vines were so old with trunks the diameter of trees that we remembered them for a long time with astonishment. Cy thought he had reached the birthplace of Dionysus; he was really convinced of the truth of the story in mythology.

We climbed a very steep mountain to reach a village without a road called Merdesh, looking for the cousin of the doorman of the hotel in Kabul to whom we had some sort of letter of introduction. The village was full of rivulets of water, with big walnut trees, houses whose roofs were used as roads. We were surrounded by cheerful, blondish children and the cousin of the doorman found us. He too was blond, very tall, and with enormous hands. He took us to visit the local Mosque of which he was very proud. It looked like a little Swiss chalet and Cy was in heaven when, entering the Mosque, we walked on a huge mattress as wide as the mosque floor, filled with chips of sandalwood and ground-up needles of stone pines. The perfume brought us straight to a Muslim Paradise. We squatted down for a long time, checking by now and then each other's expression of delight.

In the house of our chaperone we were given the usual mint tea and an unusual dance by a young boy who sinuously made copies of figures of Greek vases, ending up in a semi-trance with trembling body. It was so astonishing that we suspected our civilized connection in Kabul or the tourist office had put it on for us as an intellectually refined scene. Cy commented that he had seen something similar in the 50's, in Egypt: Bardashes dancing the *Bee dance*, the same that Flaubert described in his trip on the Nile, hundred years before. But in our case there was something tragic about the scene, a feeling of embarrassment and far fetchedness. Many years later, at the time of the Taliban, a war broke out among them about the possession of a dancing boy. Next day the local cousin came to pick us up in the guest house at the bottom of the valley, and in wild excitement he kept telling us that in the village they were descendants of Alexander the Great; we were so happy to believe it. After all, the historians following Alexander described that when the Greek soldiers arrived there they could understand the local language, since the Indo-Aryan emigration to the west of few century before.

The same man showed us the site where a sanctuary of grapes grew on trees. He fielded our questions about wine-making in such a smart way that we were very enthusiastic to believe that it was true. Then he showed us how to cross the tumbling waters of the river coming down from the Pamir using inflated goatskins. Cy learned from him how to swim the river and we all felt very powerful crossing the waters back and forth diagonally, accompanying the strength of the current stream and simultaneously going slightly against it. We even started to believe we had big hands like our local swim teacher and imagined feeling the emotions of Alexander the Great's soldiers.

All of a sudden the head of the police arrived in with very excited gesturing and in bad English announced to us that the mujahidin rebels had murdered the region's governor and he could not assure our safety anymore, so we rushed with our bags way back to Kabul. It was the first time I heard the word "mujahidin". The Sicilians showed such strength and discipline on this occasion that Cy remarked how they become rational whereas they had been undisciplined until then.

A torrential persistent rain caught us on the way back, floods from the mountains above made us slide every now and then close to the deep ravine, where at the bottom the river looked like a Hollywood staging of hell. At one point Cy, sitting next to me at the back of the Jeep, saw the double back-wheel on the left side rolling in the emptiness of the ravine. Both of us have never stopped thanking the Toyota super-engine and

the driver. But since everything has always two sides at the moment of near-tragedy, the rest of the passengers did not notice; as a matter of fact, the angelic young blond Sicilian girl exclaimed: "Oh! Mamma, guarda giù che bello il fiume in piena!" Soon night came and at a certain point we had to rebuild the road which had been washed out under the violent rain. The exhaustion from stress, emotion, and fear made us resigned to anything. At a certain moment Cy screamed out: "I see lights, let's go there and ask for help!" Some villagers were faster than us and came with lanterns to help rebuild the part of the road damaged by the water.

A few hours later we were stopped by a military checkpoint and escorted very bluntly to the barracks. The officers who first questioned us fiercely later treated us with great kindness. We had to stop overnight, while a nasty bombing raid went on. We could see the shelling going on from the two opposite sites of the contenders. The chief of the barracks invited us to eat with him and a few other officers and soldiers served us delicious food.

The chief officer was fascinated by Cy, after I showed him two photographs of his paintings; poor Cy had to slalom the bizarre intellectual questions of an Afghanistan military man. I gave one of the soldiers that attended us for lunch a can of meat as a gift and next day on leaving I asked him if he had liked my gift. He answered me in approximate English: "Oh no! No eat pig! Changed cousin one bottle" (I realized at that moment that everybody in Afghanistan named a friend a cousin).

By that point our spirit of adventure had been consumed by so many episodes that back in Kabul we substituted cultural discovery for spontaneous discovery: we bought whatever pleased us in the fabulous "Chicken Street" market; we bought ancient costumes, books, velvet textiles, rags only for the colors, lapis lazuli; we marveled at the exotic "One Dollar Hotel" owned by Alighiero Boetti, and visited the fantastic Kabul museum. Cy visited again the spiritual place of the tomb of Babur, whose photograph he kept beside his bed until his death. Sometimes, when I look at the work of Cy done after Afghanistan I have the impression of seeing the traces from the psychological and physical events that took place during the trip, and the distress Cy felt about the destruction brought there after our departure by attempts to reduce life to ideology, religious fanaticism or to impose rationality.

Back in Rome, later, to refresh our memory of Afghanistan and in honor of that country, we participated to a demonstration against the Soviet invasion, and by coincidence among Pashtun hats, chanting Saffron Hare Krishnas, screaming people, and all kind of things, we ran

into Francesco Clemente. The confusion was great and anarchic and creative, and at a certain moment Francesco Clemente screamed out, at our surprise: “Viva the Afghan greyhound!”

ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

All works by Cy Twombly: © Cy Twombly Foundation, New York / Rome
1-5 © Cy Twombly Foundation. Courtesy Archives Fondazione Nicola Del Roscio.

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Cited works are divided in two different ways, differentiating between academic literature referred to seldom or only once and the more often cited literature on Cy Twombly: In the essays' footnotes, the academic literature is described fully upon its first use and subsequently with "op. cit." (after the name of the author and year of publication); the other references—references pertaining to Cy Twombly—are broken up in the footnotes in the same short form according to author or location (for catalogs) along with the publication year and itemized in the Cy Twombly bibliography below.—Unless otherwise noted, the catalog number is listed in the footnotes after the respective oeuvre catalog abbreviation.

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COVER ILLUSTRATION

Cy Twombly: *Cnidian Venus*, 1966, wax crayon, lead pencil on canvas, 200 × 170 cm, Collection Cy Twombly Foundation cf. p. 191, ill. 2 (Contour drawing by Kathrin Roussel, © Sichtvermerk 2013)

ILLUSTRATION P. 8

Cy Twombly, Gaeta, 1994, Photo: Bruce Weber (© Cy Twombly Foundation. Courtesy Archives Fondazione Nicola Del Roscio, Photo Bruce Weber).

Cy Twombly quotations beneath chapter headings are taken from Sylvester 2001 and Serota 2008

TRANSLATORS

Orla Mulholland translated the texts by Boschung, Hammerstaedt, Latacz, Priwitzer, Speck, Wildung, and edited the essays by Charvát, and Hakutani; Daniel Mufson translated Braungart, Dobbe, Greub, Hoppe-Sailer, Keazor, Roussel and edited Bontea; Ehren Fordyce translated Boehm, Rosenauer, and Siegel; Timothy Murray translated Zweite.

Quotations from German books are translated directly from the German texts, if there was no English version available; the same is the case with books translated into German; sometimes, if the text is from literature or philosophy, the German version has been added in square brackets.

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Thierry Greub Art historian and exhibition curator.— Studies of art history, philosophy and german philology at the University of Basel; 1997–2000 Academic Assistant of Prof. Dr. Gottfried Boehm at the Department of Art History at the University of Basel; Dissertation on Johannes Vermeer: Greub, Thierry (2004): *Johannes Vermeer oder die Inszenierung der Imagination*, Petersberg: Imhof.—2002–2008 Assistant Director of the Art Center Basel, curator of several exhibitions, including: *Homer. Der Mythos von Troia in Dichtung und Kunst*, Hirmer 2008; *Museums in the 21st Century: Concepts, Projects, Buildings*, Prestel 2006.—Since 2009 Research Associate at the Morphomata International Center for Advanced Studies at the University of Cologne.—Latest publication on Cy Twombly: Greub, Thierry (2017): *Der ungezähmte Blick: Texte zu Cy Twombly*, Paderborn: Fink.—Field of Research: Cy Twombly; Johannes Vermeer; Velázquez’ *Las Meninas*; Late Gothic limewood altars; Reception of Homer; Peter Zumthor.



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